

Main Estimates

The minister partly anticipated my second question. I should like to know not only what control Treasury Board has but what control parliament has. During all my years as a member of parliament I have never seen a thorough investigation by any committee of the House of Crown corporations. I recognize that it is not possible to do this between the present time and May 31 because the committees to which estimates are referred will be dealing with those departmental estimates. Therefore it is not likely that they will be able to devote much time to Crown corporations. But it seems to me that it would be possible, if the government were prepared so to do, to refer the annual financial reports of Crown corporations to appropriate committees, which could deal with those questions after we have disposed of the estimates. That procedure would give the respective committees the opportunity to look into such entities as Canadian National Railways, which has not been examined for many years, Air Canada, and other Crown corporations about which the public knows little and about whose financial management the members of this House know little. I do not know how much the cabinet knows about the financial administration of some large Crown corporations.

Mr. Mazankowski: Right on.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I ask the minister if it is not possible to work out with his colleagues and with House leaders a *modus operandi* whereby it would be possible to bring the financial reports of each of our Crown corporations before some standing committee of the House some time during the year? We could do this even if it means that some committees must come back for a while during the recess and spend some time considering these questions. Personally, and I am sure the minister must feel the same way, I feel guilty when I go back to the public and tell them that we have not looked at these—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I think I anticipated some of the hon. member's comments with regard to access by parliament to annual reports, etc. Really, I cannot say more than I said a few minutes ago. However, I will raise one point. I shall need a few more weeks, hopefully, to digest some of the details, and formulate some ideas which are developing along the line indicated, as well as other ideas. If this matter is treated as hon. members seem to agree it ought to be treated, we will need to consider the question of time and availability. This point is not unrelated to the earlier point concerning the examination of estimates of each department.

One should stop to think of the incredible amount of detailed work the committees will need to do and the time it will take to conduct such an examination. If we go that route, we shall need to be selective. We shall need to rotate our examinations perhaps over a period of two, three, four, even five years, to make sure that every department is examined. We shall need to be selective if we are to examine in detail, or if we are concerned for any reason. I will be glad, when we

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

have time, to sit down with hon. members and work this matter out on a productive and prospective basis.

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to endorse what already has been said by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) with regard to the examination of estimates. Having served for two years as chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and waded through the Wilson committee report, and the report of the independent review committee, all of which dealt with the evident lack of control over government spending, I would endorse what has previously been said and suggest to the minister that some vehicle must be found whereby not just one or two departments but all departments of government are examined by parliamentarians. When we return to our constituencies and are asked why we allowed certain expenditures—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. While I appreciate very much the sentiments of the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse), I must say that this period is provided in the Standing Orders for the putting of questions to ministers, not for the making of statements or remarks already made. If the hon. member wishes to ask a question, perhaps he will put it forthwith.

Mr. Crouse: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to lay the groundwork for my question. Since it is proposed to televise the proceedings of parliament, and since implementation of that proposal will make it almost impossible for members to sit in committee while the House is being televised, may I ask the minister if he has discussed this matter with his colleagues, in the hope that the estimates of at least six departments will be brought to the House? We, as members of parliament, should have the opportunity to examine estimates here, in committee of the whole. I ask this question, bearing in mind the May 31 deadline.

We examined neither the Post Office nor the Department of Labour estimates last year or the year before. Would the minister consider referring those estimates to this House, so that the committee of the whole House will have the opportunity to consider fully such departmental expenditures? Would the minister say what he plans along these lines?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I can elaborate further on what I have already said. With respect, the hon. member has asked very much the same kind of question to which I have been responding, but I will be glad to consider it. I will not give a precise and detailed commitment now. I must do an awful lot of work on this question before I can do that.

• (1630)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

[English]

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)