

Dollar Items

great a concern this is. We certainly know of the hardship it creates both in terms of individuals and their governments. There is a very major problem in the economy. The hon. member for Eglinton has already mentioned the situation of national unity. It was echoed by his alter ego from Kenora-Rainy River. There is a need to try and come to grips in a responsible fashion with that whole question.

Third, there is the subject of energy which, again, is a major concern and major problem for the people of my area, Prince Edward Island. This was picked up and echoed eloquently in the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre when he talked about the tremendous need there is for a government really to come to grips with these issues. The hon. member stated that the question is not really one of adjusting procedures or changing the rules of the House, but for the government to take initiatives on these major issues. I could not agree more. I was not at all surprised to hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre preaching this kind of call as eloquently as he did and has done throughout his years of service in this House. However, for the former cabinet minister, the hon. member for Eglinton, and a former parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River, to take this tack seems to be committing some kind of public suicide.

When the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River was ending his remarks I thought the House of Commons was being turned into a public confessional. He seemed to be echoing more of his own problems with respect to his party than anything else. If both of these individuals, as spokesmen for the government this afternoon, suggest that this parliament is failing to come to grips with the essential issues that concern this country, I would point out to them that the primary responsibility for that failure has to rest with themselves. Where do they think legislation comes from?

I have not been here as long as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, but I have been here for close to a dozen years. I have learned that when it comes to taking action that requires the expenditure of one dollar in this House of Commons, it must be initiated by a member of the cabinet. If the hon. member for Eglinton or the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River feel that there has not been effective grappling with the issues that concern this country, either concerning the economy, national unity, energy or other essential problems, that surely lies with them and their colleagues for failing to initiate these matters in the House of Commons.

It is true that from time to time the length of debate on issues is controlled by the opposition. I agree there is need for change in our procedure with regard to the length of speeches. However, it is still true that the government has to initiate basic programs, basic policies and deal with these tremendous problems.

● (1720)

What we are faced with this afternoon, I believe, is two things. First of all, as Your Honour made it clear in your ruling a few moments ago, there must be adequate debate,

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

particularly on major policy initiatives. When we sweep away all the verbiage with respect to whether or not \$1 items can properly be used to deal with certain legislative measures, the real issue, as Your Honour recognized, is that if there is not an opportunity in the House of Commons fully to explore and probe and have the government defend its position with respect to major initiatives, then surely none of us is doing our job adequately, and that is what this debate is all about. There has not been an opportunity to debate this issue adequately, and the government has all too willingly used the device of supplementary estimates D to slough through a whole bunch of initiatives for which there will be no parliamentary accountability, and for that they should be held to account for a betrayal of responsibility as the government of the country.

The second thing that is clearly indicated in this wholesale use of \$1 items is that the government is increasingly losing control even of its own responsibility and administration of expenditures. For a government to come in at this late date with the final list of supplementary estimates and ask, in the space of a couple of weeks, for a few committees to look at these items at random and in one day to jam the whole thing through parliament is, to my mind, a totally arrogant and offensive approach to the way in which our democratic system is meant to operate. Quite frankly, I am shocked that no government spokesman has given even a hint of a defence for this unwarranted and unacceptable procedure. That is what this debate is all about today. That is what we want to hear some representative of the government defend before the debate is concluded at 9.45 tonight.

Mr. Ralph E. Goodale (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to put a few remarks on the record this afternoon with respect to the point raised in the motion put before the House by the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). I think it might be useful to look back at the precedents of the House to see how this matter of \$1 items has been handled in the past, and I intend to do that because I think it might be a useful exposition for members in any future analysis of this question.

I think Mr. Speaker was most helpful today in the judgment he delivered to the House a short while ago in analysing the present situation dealing with the estimates before us. I am sure the words of His Honour in specifying particularly how he would like to see these items handled will be very helpful for the government and, indeed, for all members of parliament in dealing with this question in future. I think his suggestion of a reasoned confrontation on the specific points that members might want to call into issue is very useful. I, for one, look forward to seeing that procedure adopted as one that would be useful to the House in determining specific instances—not in the generalities of a broadside attack which we have heard from hon. members opposite today, but in specific cases—when members of the House take exception to a particular item appearing as a \$1 item and the basis upon which that exception is taken. It is all very well to wax eloquent in general terms when you are not called upon to account or to be specific