

important department we wonder what kind of planning the government undertakes with respect to scrutinizing the affairs of its departments.

May I ask the minister if, with the government House leader, he will ensure the right of each committee to determine its own activity, and ensure that government estimates receive high priority in the organization of the affairs of the House? Will he give that undertaking now, notwithstanding the fact that he is not now going to institute other changes of a more substantial nature?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of question I have been receiving in different forms. I do not think I can add to what I have said already. The deeper I get into this the more I understand the need for time to move on it with better concentration. My information is that as a government there are some adjustments we are going to have to make in discussions with the Auditor General etc. A great deal of the rest of it is the decision of this House. I can only indicate some understanding of the concerns and a sympathetic response, but I will not make any specific procedural commitment at this stage.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a proposal for the minister to consider with the government House leader. It seems to me it would be sensible for the minister to give an undertaking that he will at least ask the government House leader that these estimates be brought to the Committee of the Whole so that we can be assured no department will be left without being examined. That way we would know, with the time limit involved, that we have an opportunity of examining every department. That is a simple proposition. It does not require the instigation of any fundamental change in the procedures. It seems to me the minister could give that undertaking.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to look carefully at that representation.

Mr. Speaker: I shall recognize the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas), followed by the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse). I think that should conclude the questioning.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, one of the matters which has concerned members for a good many years is the apparent lack of effective control over Crown corporations, not just with respect to their day-to-day operations and not just with respect to little scandals which turn up, such as payments by AECL and kick-backs by Polysar, but the control of the expenditures, the borrowing and priorities which are pursued by the Crown corporations.

● (1620)

I want to ask the minister two questions. What effective control is exercised by Treasury Board over Crown corporations? Does Treasury Board have complete control of their budgets, that is to say, both their current and their capital budgets? Does it exercise control over their borrowing powers,

and over priorities to be used in establishing borrowings? Does it have any role with respect to the disposition of surpluses which Crown corporations may have accumulated by the end of the year? Is any surplus remitted, in theory, to Treasury Board; does Treasury Board decide whether all of it or some of it shall be returned to the Crown corporation for development, in addition to other funds for which the minister responsible may ask? What type of control does Treasury Board exercise? It is extremely important for the House to know this. Certainly there is no adequate opportunity for hon. members to acquire this information.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, it would take a fair amount of time to respond to the specific parts of that question. Without generalizing too much let me say that so far as I am concerned there must be greater control of Crown corporations. I will be making specific recommendations, to which I may reasonably anticipate my colleagues will agree.

Mr. Mazankowski: Will there be recommendations for greater parliamentary control?

Mr. Andras: Yes. They may include greater control by the government, greater parliamentary control, and greater access by parliament to the whole system of information, annual reports, etc. I will not anticipate because I do not have those recommendations in my hot little fist yet; but I share some of the concern which has been raised.

This question brings to the fore another question, that of avoiding or at least of recognizing the danger of using financial control to gain other kinds of control over a Crown corporation. As you know, it is a fact of life that those who have the bucks have a lot to say about what should or should not be done.

An hon. Member: Why not have such control?

Mr. Andras: I am sure that there are a great number of enthusiasts in this House, in all parties, who would exercise such control in some Crown corporations, but we had better understand what we are getting into. As for financial control, I really have no argument about that aspect of the question. I think we all recognize that it is time to step in and gain a much clearer understanding as to the kind of authority which exists with regard to capital budgets, operating budgets, etc. Certainly parliament should have access to such information, to the maximum possible degree. It is time for certain procedures to be reconsidered.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I am sure hon. members will be pleased by the minister's reply. We shall be looking for action along the lines he indicated. I point out that it is the right and obligation of both the government and parliament to exercise financial control, because public moneys are being spent, and if a Crown corporation incurs debts and cannot by virtue of its operation retire them, the taxpayers of Canada, finally, will have to repay the money owing.