

Control of Public Funds

Canada has been among the leaders in the almost worldwide movement to rationalize the procedures by which governments arrive at expenditure decisions. It has adopted the basic principles of planning, programming and budgeting, adapting them in a unique way to Canadian institutions and constraints. As part of this new system it requires each spring long-term, detailed forecast from each department and agency as to the requirements of the existing programs and their proposed new programs. It assesses all these potential demands in terms of available resources and then provides guidance to ministers and their officials as to an optimum allocation of available resources. This guidance is then given effect in detail by the treasury board in its review of departmental expenditure plans and by the departments and agencies as they prepare their estimates.

At a still more direct level of management, the government has in every way advocated and supported the introduction and advancement of modern techniques and methods of management. Through the treasury board it is causing departments to undertake in an organized way studies of the effectiveness of their programs, and these have led to modifications that have enhanced effectiveness.

The board secretariat has also worked with several departments and is to work with others in the application of efficiency measures to as many of the actual operations of departments as possible. These measures will give the government an indication of comparative efficiency as between operations of a like nature in different departments and a means to raise productivity to higher levels for the same or a lesser expenditure of resources.

In addition to the measures that have been taken and are being taken and to which I have referred, the hon. gentleman suggested a new approach to the work of the public accounts committee. The public accounts committee, as I think all hon. members are aware, has addressed itself to a consideration of events that have taken place—an examination of the past rather than the work of examining estimates, which is a look into future plans.

I have suggested that the committee system of detailed review of departmental estimates is a much more effective way than the hitherto employed system of examination of the estimates in the committee of the whole for understanding and learning what the programs are all about and how they can be improved. May I repeat that the experience that we gained, even this year in the current session, from reverting to an examination of estimates of departments in committee of the whole has shown that this method is not productive, is not useful and is not an informative experience.

I think I would have the same kind of reaction to the suggestion made by the hon. member that the rules be changed to provide for time in the House to discuss departmental estimates. I suspect that he intends, though he did not say so in his proposal, that this be in addition to the number of supply or opposition days now provided in the rules. He suggests that we revert to what, in my view, is a non-productive exercise for the committee of the whole, and at this juncture I would find it rather difficult to go along with that suggestion.

[Mr. Drury.]

The hon. member has also suggested that we might bring in a new Auditor General act. I recall to him that an earlier attempt to formulate an act proposed by the public accounts committee and to introduce it into the house was rejected by the hon. member and his party, without even making any suggestion as to what changes would be useful or examining the document itself.

Mr. Baldwin: Nonsense.

Mr. Drury: I hope that the approach of the hon. gentleman and his party to the new act which is being prepared under the auspices of the same body, the public accounts committee, will receive a rather more reasonable or rational reception when it is proposed to the House than his party accorded the last one.

Mr. Baldwin: It is being prepared by a committee outside of the public accounts.

Mr. Drury: That interjection, Mr. Speaker, was "It is being prepared". I suggest that the bill is being prepared by, and will be the product of, the public accounts committee and cannot be described as the product of some body outside of the public accounts committee.

Mr. Baldwin: Oh, come on!

Mr. Drury: The hon. gentleman cannot have it both ways. If his scriptwriter talks about overburgeoning bureaucracy, he cannot now try and throw back on to this bureaucracy any claims regarding what he says it should be doing.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I did not suggest anything of the kind in my interjection. I simply said that there is a committee established by the public accounts committee which is engaged in preparing the bill and will bring it to the public accounts committee. I know as well as the minister knows that that is right, so why doesn't he say so?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, we have had some remarks about use of time in standing committees being non-productive and perhaps we are having some examples of the non-productive use of time at this moment.

Mr. Baldwin: We have for the last 25 minutes.

Mr. Drury: The hon. gentleman suggested that the form of the estimates must be changed and he said that his new government would do this. I said earlier, and I repeat, that we would welcome any suggestions for improvement in the form of presentation of the estimates; and if, to use his words, they are now designed to conceal rather than reveal—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order.

Mr. Drury: —they are, in effect, the product of the committee of which his party is chairman.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. It being one o'clock the House will now adjourn until two p.m.

At one o'clock the House took recess.