

Canadian Economy

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Surely the hon. member will agree that he raised an argument rather than a point of order.

[English]

Mr. McKenzie: There was one very good suggestion—cut out the government.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): That is a nonsensical answer.

Mr. McKenzie: What Liberal members fail to realize—

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): The only place he is any good is on CBC radio—

Mr. McKenzie: Yes, he wants me there tomorrow. There are a number of other radio stations as well.

What the Liberals fail to realize is that it is not just social programs for which the government is responsible. It is also responsible for managing your affairs properly and having a proper accounting.

Crown corporations have to spend properly. The hon. member is aware of all the Viscount aircraft at the Winnipeg airport that were overhauled at a cost of between \$200,000 and \$600,000 each, but are only worth \$10,000 to \$50,000 on the market. They cannot be flown because they are not airworthy.

I will give another example of mismanagement. The hon. member asked me a question which I will answer. A number of years ago there was the Samson-Belair report which cost \$239,000. If dealt very extensively with regard to postal delivery being left in the hands of private contractors. It went into the dollars and cents, and stated why that business should be left to private contractors. When the Post Office took over, there were 239 more trucks and hundreds more men. We had the cost of the Post Office operation going up and the service going down.

In committee I asked deputy ministers if they could cut their expenditures by at least 10 per cent a year. A number of them have told me that if so instructed by their ministers they could curtail expenditures by 10 per cent. I have presented motions requesting that this be done, but the Liberals have turned them down.

• (1700)

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) says present excessive expenditures have been brought about as a result of pressure from the news media, the opposition, and the general public. I challenged him on this issue in the context of Information Canada. That costs only a paltry \$10 million a year, but it amounts to nothing but a bunch of duplication. There are 750 information officers spread out among the departments as a whole. We do not need them all. Information Canada is just duplication. That is a prime example, and I suggest to hon. members that if they read this speech they will find out a lot more.

Mr. Faproski: Don't go now, Joe. Can't you stand the heat?

Mr. McKenzie: Joe wouldn't run his shoe store the way this government runs the country.

Approximately half the government's spending cannot be touched by parliament as it is in the form of statutory estimates which can be examined, but not reduced. Members of parliament, when asked to approve estimates, do not receive government spending proposals in the form of meaningful programs in which objectives are outlined and justified on the basis of factual data. I am sure the hon. member for South Shore (Mr. Crouse) will back me up in this assertion. There should be many improvements in the government's accounting system.

Mr. Crouse: Hear, hear!

Mr. McKenzie: The 1968-69 rule changes effectively curtailed the operations of parliament so that it no longer has an effective rein on supply. The result is that members of parliament now must spend long hours just trying to understand the format of the Blue Book of Estimates. Increasingly moneys are concealed in estimates and hidden votes such as those designated for security measures. These are being used more and more often. The party to which I belong is concerned about this, Mr. Speaker. It is a very real issue. The federal government is obsessed with secrecy with respect to its spending plans and programs. It conceals money in the estimates without explanation, and it prevents Commons committees from calling witnesses who are supposed to be responsible for directing expenditures into which we are inquiring.

The Ontario government made a very wise move recently. It hired the former Auditor General, Mr. Maxwell Henderson. He can be expected to stir up a storm in connection with almost anything he tackles. He has the rare ability to be able to cut through the fog and put his finger on sensitive issues. In a relatively short time, Henderson and his committee were able to come up with 184 recommendations which, if implemented, could save Ontario taxpayers \$3.6 billion over the next two years. This is the gentleman whose authority hon. members opposite wished to curtail.

There is one person who is supposed to have been given the power to act as a watchdog over government spending, and that is the Auditor General. Bearing this in mind I should like to quote what my hon. friend from Peace River said in this House on June 2:

As the power of the Commons has diminished with regard to meaningful examination and scrutiny of estimates, we have driven back to the final line of defence of the beleaguered taxpayer of Canada, the office of the Auditor General.

Unfortunately, though, the federal government is trying to place limitations on the power of the Auditor General in order to ensure that parliament, in the words of my hon. friend from Peace River, "does not have an effective, useful and meaningful Auditor General's office."

I should like to read some excerpts from the report of the Auditor General which I have to hand. For example, he states:

A number of major concerns related to internal audit have been identified and may be summarized as follows: some departments have no internal audit.

I wonder whether the hon. member for St. Boniface carries out his business without an internal audit. I doubt it.

Internal auditors are often involved in systems which may divert them or compromise their ability to discharge their responsibility.