

It was quite obvious from the remarks of the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River that he in no way defended the practice of this government of bringing in \$1 items, some of major proportion respecting new policies, new programs, shifts in priority. These are items that we have raised in a general way in this debate. It was really a question of government accountability, government performance, government responsibility with respect to the programs it is pursuing under a whole host of \$1 items which it has been impossible to discuss in this House prior to today's debate, on which the guillotine will fall at 9.45 p.m. tonight.

It was a sign of weakness, I guess, on the part of the government that it had to put up this recycled team of Eglinton and Kenora-Rainy River. I am not going to comment on their efficiency or effectiveness when they served in this House in their previous posts, but if this is the best defence the government has to this monstrous use of \$1 items, this absolutely irresponsible approach to the expenditure of public money in this place, the government has no defence whatever.

● (1710)

I do not want to construct here the kind of defence or presentation that the government should have made. However, I would have expected by this time of the day that we might have heard from some of the ministers who are here, such as the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) who has a \$1 item on this list, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford), or some others. They could have told us that there was such urgency or such an immediate requirement for these funds that they had to come to parliament, and sort of offer a bit of an apology because they knew this was not the best or most acceptable way. After all, we are not dealing here with the main estimates or the first supplementaries, second or third supplementaries, but the very last set that will be included in this fiscal year. I had expected them to say something like, "Look, fellows, we know you will understand. We have a responsibility in our department to provide a particular service or program, or change something we have discovered is no longer adequate. We know you are going to give this kind of approval to pursue this estimate because it is in the public interest." However, we have not had that defence.

In all of these 50 or so \$1 items, not a single government spokesman, minister, parliamentary secretary or backbencher has stood up and said anything like that. What has been their argument? It has been the ridiculous one that because of a point of order yesterday, we raised the propriety under our rules of some specific ten items, not all, being pursued in this manner to see whether they were procedurally correct and should be pursued. Today we came in with a substantive approach to the indiscriminate use of \$1 items. Therefore, we have this business between the hon. member for Eglinton and the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River, plus the hour or two yesterday, saying that we should not deal with this kind of frivolous issue and that we should get on to the main issues of the day. I hope that before this debate is over some minister will have enough sense and courage to give us positive justification for this extraordinary use.

### *Dollar Items*

Yesterday the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader used a number of precedents. He said there were something like 11 \$1 items since 1971 which would establish some kind of a precedent of usage which would justify the \$1 items being questioned particularly yesterday. We have before us, not 11, 22 or 33, but some 50 plus \$1 items of varying shades of proportions with respect to the shift of government expenditure, the establishment of a new Crown corporation, a change in the nature of legislation with respect to tax exemptions, the lifting of guarantees in the billions of dollars to other Crown corporations, the changing of debt to equity of major proportions for the St. Lawrence Seaway, which has implications on much of the shipping in the eastern part of this country. There is no explanation from this government as to the justification for this kind of procedure.

What we have is one of two things: either the government is too embarrassed to feel that it can produce any possible explanation to justify this wholesale usage of \$1 items, or—and this was not said by the hon. member for Eglinton or the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River—it does not really feel it important.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) talked about the danger of continually downgrading, throwing up one's hands and saying that parliament had lost its central role or its importance to the effective functioning of our democratic system. He defended the fact that parliament is still alive and well. I hope this debate will contribute to that general state of health.

The hon. member might have said one of the problems, surely, has been that it has been an increasing mark and characteristic of this government to downgrade, bypass, circumvent and substantially ignore the whole of the parliamentary process, all in the name of efficiency or in the government's own sense of "it knows best". If it has reached such a state of mental poverty that it is not able this afternoon to give a proper defence or reasoned explanation to the people of this country for this kind of circumventing of the parliamentary process, then things are in an even more sorry state than we realize.

There was one point of debate today on which there has been agreement. The hon. member for Eglinton said he felt there must be more time to discuss the real issues of the day. He mentioned three in particular. He said there were obvious questions of major economic proportions. There is no question about that, certainly to a representative of a province like Prince Edward Island where official unemployment figures are somewhere between 12 per cent and 15 per cent and unofficial unemployment figures go anywhere up to 30 per cent.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs and I know that the 5,000 people that Statistics Canada reports are unemployed, plus the many who would be listed as receiving unemployment insurance benefits, are not enjoying the benefits of a healthy economy today. I refer to those people who live in Prince Edward Island. Similar situations prevail in too many areas of the five eastern provinces of this country. I have mentioned far too often in this chamber that members on all sides know how