

Control of Government Expenditures

steps to exercise greater scrutiny and control over estimates and expenditures.

The amendment moved by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre states that the committees do only a perfunctory study of government expenditures and it recommends that we go back to the practice of past years, that is to say that certain items be considered by the House of Commons and others by the Standing Committees.

The criticisms and remarks of the hon. member for Peace River dealt mainly with generalities, Mr. Speaker. But as was suggested by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) this afternoon, part of the increases in government expenditures are transfers or amounts being spent on cost-sharing programs.

I would like to give a few examples of increases in those cost-sharing programs as well as in transfers of funds to the provinces. Among others the amounts allotted to National Health and Welfare for the 1972-73 fiscal year total \$3,831 million as compared to \$1,824 million for 1964-65, which represents 24 cents out of every dollar of taxes paid by the taxpayers of this country.

As far as economic expansion or development is concerned, the estimates are \$2,241 million, compared with \$805 million for the year 1964-65.

As for transfer payments made to the provinces, in 1964-65 they were \$358 million, compared with \$1,307 million for 1972-73.

We note that in 1964-65, the government spent \$28 million for education support programs compared with \$667 million earmarked for this purpose in 1972-73.

Under the heading of cultural activities and leisure, expenditures now total \$368 million against \$169 million in 1964-65.

The estimates for 1964-65 totalled \$7,218 million and \$15,749 million for 1972-73. The figure I have just mentioned for 1972-73 represents 52 per cent of the estimates for this year.

I would like also to draw a few comparisons relating to the Department of National Health and Welfare. In 1968-69, expenditures for medical services amounted to \$35 million and for 1971-72 to \$581,200,000; in 1968-69, the federal government contributed \$560 million for hospital services compared with \$841,556,000 for 1971-72.

I could go on listing figures, Mr. Speaker, I will point out, moreover, that part of the estimates increase since 1964-65 results from transfers to provinces or from federal contributions to cost-sharing programs.

I would like now to touch briefly on the question of control over government expenses. Some would like to revert to old methods. I too experienced this in 1961-62. That was when the House, sitting as a committee of the whole, then known as the committee on supply, was reviewing government expenses.

In 1964-65, the votes of only two departments were referred to standing committees: the committee on veterans affairs and the committee on external affairs. And I remember, Mr. Speaker, that in 1961-62, while the government proposed to the House to review the expenditures of a department, strangely enough, one or two days later, it

[Mr. Clermont.]

submitted the expenditures of another department or a new bill.

I for one prefer the method adopted since 1968 whereby all government outlays are referred to one or other of the 16 standing committees of the House. I do not understand the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre when he says that those committees study government expenses superficially.

If I refer to a study made by the Committees Branch, Mr. Speaker, I see that during the second session of the 28th Parliament, 152 meetings were spent on the study of the various departmental estimates. Having had the honour of being chairman of the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, as well as a member of other committees—not, like the President of the Treasury Board, on the opposition side only, but both as an opposition and a government member—I would say that on the whole members who sit on committees are responsible people and study government expenses in depth.

I was surprised to hear the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) say this afternoon that in some cases debates are cut short. I have sat with the hon. member for Timiskaming and I do not think it is easy for a chairman to try and stop him from making remarks.

Now, if I refer to the third session of the 28th Parliament, I think that the 16 committees spent 179 meetings on an in-depth study of government expenses.

Over and above the committees which study estimates, we also have to consider the mechanism for checking expenses, which is the public accounts committee. This committee again considered the matter of checking public accounts last fall, on November 9 and 16, 1971, as is evidence in Issues Nos. 51 and 52 of the committee proceedings. On that occasion, the committee had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Balls, assistant deputy minister of the Department of Supply and Services, who informed us that as far as tabling public accounts for the year 1970-71 was concerned, the government had made a commitment, back in 1968, through the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Richardson), to table the Public Accounts of Canada on October 31 at the latest. This year, the three volumes were tabled, the last of which on November 4. Public accounts were tabled two months earlier than for 1969-70 for volumes II and III, and three months for volume I.

The Public Accounts Committee set up a sub-committee made up of a member from each party and representatives for the Auditor General, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Supply and Services, to make a study in depth of the possibility of accelerating the tabling in the House of the public accounts of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that the formula whereby the study of government expenditures is referred to standing committees, and once those expenditures are made, their study is entrusted to the committee of public accounts, is an excellent one.

There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, as other members said it before me, that we have to find more efficient means to improve that situation and those procedures. I see that the Auditor General is being blamed, because his report for the year ending on March 31, 1971 will be tabled late, but he gave the reasons for that delay. As a member of this House, I would have liked the Auditor General to make