

Control of Public Funds

Supply and Services (Mr. Goyer) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), who are pastmasters in the art of circumambulating. They take about ten times the length of time required to ask a question to answer it, and at the end of that time they have said nothing. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald) rises day after day, week after week and month after month and speaks in great circles, never ending, saying nothing.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) considers the ultimate in the discharge of the responsibilities of his portfolio to be a visit to Rochdale College where he puts his feet on the table, watches television for an hour or two and returns here in an effort to answer questions, but says nothing. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) is a pastmaster of the technique of evading answers to questions in this House. He not only circumvents every question but in his answers he gets in a little political jab.

Hon. members on the other side and those to my left say, "Let us make this Parliament work. Let us make this House work. Let us not go to the people for an election right away." I suggest they do not want to do that. How do they make this Parliament work? They talk about information, but in answers they provide us with just as little information as possible.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: If the hon. member wants to interject, I should like to hear him rather than have him try to smuggle his interjection on to the record of *Hansard* without my being able to hear it.

Mr. Mather: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) is, in my opinion, one of the most valuable members of the committees and the House. We are now discussing an important motion brought forward by a member of his party. I should think that, with his ability and the time at his disposal, he would provide more facts in support of the motion than he has provided so far. I think he could employ his time to better purpose.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. With regard to the hon. member's point of order, the Chair was about to rise and make a suggestion to the hon. member who has the floor. My English is not 100 per cent perfect, but I can follow speeches quite well. Having reread the motion I had intended to mention to the hon. member that his remarks were slightly off base, as we say in common language.

An hon. Member: Off the rails.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): The hon. member is a respected speaker in the House and I am sure he will try to make his remarks a little more relevant to the motion before us.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I have always had great admiration for your ability to follow debates, and great respect for your rulings. However, in this instance perhaps it is the difficulty Your Honour has in following the refinements and sophistications of my argument that prevents your concluding that I am exactly on point in dis-

cussing the subject matter of this motion. What we are speaking about is the weakening of the authority of Parliament over government expenditure. I am advancing several convincing arguments as to why this erosion is occurring. I know that hon. members opposite will suggest they are unconvincing, just as sure as those on this side will feel they are convincing.

I am not going to take issue with the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather), a riding in the beautiful province of British Columbia, but I listened very carefully to him and feel he made an extremely useful and meaningful contribution to this debate. I was, however, somewhat taken aback when he said he deplored the duplication or multiplication of products by private enterprise which find their way into the market. I have always wondered whether, should this policy be implemented, I would object to everyone in the country brushing his teeth with Crest, or everyone buying McGavin bread or what-have-you, in order to avoid this kind of duplication. I cannot understand this kind of philosophy.

The President of the Treasury Board has said new procedures were introduced to offer more opportunity to Members of Parliament to scrutinize the estimates. That, Sir, is rubbish, and the minister knows it is rubbish. It has been called by several other names in this House, and if I wanted to be more explicit I could refer to it in worse terms. The minister also said that not one dollar is spent that is not authorized by Parliament. That borders on gross deceit. Of course, he is right in one sense; certainly no money is spent on government programs unless it is authorized by Parliament. What the minister does not say when uttering those half-truths is that he and the government have developed the practice of spending the money first and then coming to Parliament for authorization, perhaps as long as a year after it has been spent.

No better example of this can be cited than the government's conduct since dissolution of the previous Parliament. During the interval between dissolution and the commencement of this Parliament multi-millions of dollars were spent in respect of unemployment insurance claims. Governor General's warrants were obtained by this government to implement plans which had not even been exposed to Parliament but which the executive decided should be implemented. The government spends money today and then comes to Parliament after the event and says, "This is what has been done. This is the money that has been spent, and now it requires approval." What sort of parliamentary approval is that? The minister knows this is the course being followed.

The Auditor General referred in his report to unexpended portions of authorized expenditures. These were moneys left over from departmental programs passed in a previous Parliament. Because of a change in procedures, about which the minister speaks, this is available to the government without parliamentary authority in respect of future programs. Again, after the event the government comes to Parliament and asks for approval. The moneys have been spent: we can criticize, but that is all. The whole purpose of this institution is to have the government bring in its programs, tell us about them, tell us how much money they cost and then ask us to approve, (a) the program and (b) the sums to be expended. That is the