

*Public Reports*

documents put before us, recognizing full well that they are probably going to be selectively read, scanned and then disposed of.

Although I support the essence of what the hon. member for Vaudreuil is trying to do with this bill, I become very concerned—notwithstanding the comments of the hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Flynn) that we have a bill which may in a sense be too wide—that it is not wide enough, for at the end of the process we might have the total cost of production of a document which might not be sufficient to cover the problems of too many being produced or ineffective use of the document notwithstanding its limited cost. I think, for instance, of the number of one-page documents which are produced by a Multilith, or what have you, which would be of very limited cost on a per item basis or on a global basis. However, they are totally ineffectual in terms of their use, and I wonder how one could in a bill such as this or any other bill contemplate, on the spur of the moment, achieving the possibility of having that kind of effective control.

I think I would be delinquent if I did not point out to the House that I have noticed, notwithstanding all the bills I have described in terms of cost of production, that given the promotion by the government of the day of the idea of restraint, the volume of costly productions crossing my desk seems to be decreasing. The volumes, publications and works which are now coming to us appear more and more to be the type of thing that I have before me, "Policy and Guidelines on Canadian Government Publishing", produced by the Treasury Board. It has cardboard covers with plastic backs and is in simple and readable, yet inexpensive, type. More and more, this seems to be the format we are using. Therefore, I cannot but believe that the process of restraint is working its way down through the various ministries and departments and that, indeed, we are getting away from expensively bound and produced documents. Perhaps even without a bill of this type we are moving toward the intention of the hon. member.

That being said, let me return to some of the problems which concern me. We hear in this House constantly—not just from the other side but also from hon. members who sit on this side—that if and when publications are produced by a particular ministry, they should find their way into this House and on to the table at the earliest possible date. One of the greatest concerns I have about this bill is that it might involve another problem which a ministry or agency would have to solve before a document could find its way into the House.

We have heard about difficulties with translation and with having printing done. If we are now to add another obstacle, whereby the printing having been done and the translation having been completed, we then have to have departments going through the exercise of determining the ultimate cost, whatever that might be, I become gravely concerned about how long it might take before a document ever finds its way to the table in this House.

I say that realizing full well that many of the documents which find their way to the table now do not have their true cost, actual cost and final cost established for as long as six

months after their production. It takes that much to draw back from the department the cost of translation, the cost of photography and the cost of publication. If we are to add another six months to the already long period of time it takes for these documents to get to us so that we might deal with them, I think the process will bog down completely, and I am very concerned that a bill such as this, in the terms in which it appears, should go forward to committee if for no other reason than that.

I think that the ill we are trying to cure should be cured. I do not accept the position of the hon. member for Kitchener when he says he is concerned that we are adding more cost, but I do believe, with the hon. member for Vaudreuil, that if we have responsible ministries, they should know before they publish what are the estimated costs of the productions. They should have general, ballpark figures, and they should be committing themselves, under a proper budgetary process, to bringing the productions within their budgets.

I suppose the difficulty in what I am saying is knowing within a reasonable timeframe that in fact you have succeeded in so doing. One has only to think about the possibility of publications becoming popular to the public as well as to this House and to the other place, and in the event of their popularity, a run on documents which require further printing and publication. Would we then get into difficulty, where we really would not know whether the documents could be brought forward? Should we estimate that they are going to be popular? Having so estimated popularity, should we run an over production and then run the risk of coming before the House having spent too much money on documents which did not sell? I am concerned that we might experience something like that. There are difficulties which are almost impossible to overcome at this early stage. How does one project how many should be published? I think actual costs are very difficult to estimate at an early stage of production.

I have pointed out some of my concerns, and I am certain the hon. member has given this matter more thought than I have had the opportunity to do so far. I am concerned, however, that this House might reject the idea, for some of the reasons put forward by the hon. member for Kitchener. I do not believe that we are adding an excessive amount to the cost of government by this particular concept. As I indicated a few moments ago, I think there must be budgetary restraints. There must be publication budgets to which ministries feel compelled to adhere before these items are published.

I think, as well, that there must already be people in ministries whose sole responsibility is to see that publications come within their budget. I find it difficult to believe that one would have to enter into an exercise of creating a whole new administrative and economic tier in ministries in order to get the kind of control which it is obvious the hon. member for Vaudreuil seeks with this bill.

In short, I do not believe that the bill proposed is too wide but, rather, that it may not be wide enough because it does not really deal with what we see happening around here. I am terribly concerned that we might be adding a time problem to