

Main Estimates

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the area I represent there is a trend in the estimates which worries me, and that has to do with the Public Service of Canada. The minister made a great play of reducing the size of the Public Service, although not by much, but in terms of the people and the families which will be involved by quite a considerable amount. At the same time the estimates indicate an increase in the cost of outside consultants. I just wonder how the minister can justify that kind of thing, which is really exchanging, I suggest, one form of expenditure for another, and in fact is moving more and more in the direction of not using the talent which is in the Public Service already. Would the minister care to comment on that?

Mr. Andras: I think the hon. member would be wise to reflect for a day or two on his comment about the increase in the cost of outside consultants. This is most frustrating for me because I have been trying to explain privately to some of my colleagues on the other side that this has got off the track. That billion dollars includes the purchase through the provinces of manpower training and adult occupational training.

● (1610)

An hon. Member: Give us a breakdown.

Mr. Andras: There is a special breakdown in the blue book. I cannot remember the number of the page but I hope hon. members read that thoroughly. I do not think they will find there is a significant increase in outside consultants. There may be a significant increase in the totality of those expenditures, some of which are related to the desire of the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) to see employment inducing measures in our expenditures. That particularly is manpower training with which I have some familiarity. In the generality, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has indicated that he said "a reduction" in the Public Service. That is not the case. It is a reduction in the increase of the growth of the Public Service; it is not an absolute reduction. Frankly I wish we could have zero growth. By rather detailed analysis of various departments, we have come to the conclusion that a 2,081 increase in the Public Service is what we can live with for 1977-78. I will be very blunt about it; I intend to keep examining that.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I undertake to look at the matter of consultants and I would like to have an opportunity to study the breakdown. I put to the minister, by way of preamble to a second question, that one of the concerns in the Public Service is the increase in the use of outside people to do jobs for which there is already expertise within the Public Service. I think we ought to use that expertise.

The second matter I wanted to raise is the question of the rules of this House. This is a matter I raised with the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) the day before yesterday. I refer particularly to the power of the Public Accounts Committee to subpoena, to examine, to choose the evidence it would bring forward. The minister has indicated he is prepared to look at the committee procedures. Is he prepared to recommend to his

[Mr. Andras.]

colleagues an increase in powers that would give the committee more of the investigative potential it has within the parliamentary system? Is he prepared to stand behind the Public Accounts Committee and the powers it needs to investigate government expenditures?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, that is a pretty wide-ranging probe that the hon. member is enticing me into. I may have sympathy but I am not going to express it today. I will re-examine that with the utmost care.

If I may come back to the preamble, Mr. Speaker, if we have the expertise inside the Public Service for analysis of a particular subject, obviously we should not go out and duplicate that.

There are cases, however, when we want confirmation or a different approach, and I think this is reasonable if we do not carry it too far. Surely the hon. member, as protective of his constituents in Ottawa as he is, would not suggest that we should create a permanent establishment of consultative requirements when we could get the information required in two months by paying a fee. That way we would not have the growth in the Public Service that goes with a permanent employee, a secretary and all the other things concerned. Surely if this is done within reason it is the wiser approach.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear to the minister that it is my contention that the Public Service of Canada is in many ways under-utilized and under-challenged. One of his predecessors indicated that was a problem but we could pursue it in another forum.

With respect to the discussion of the estimates, it is a fact that many estimates are not examined by committees, and it is a fact that parliament approves billions and billions of dollars in estimates without any scrutiny whatsoever. Is the minister in a position to say what his view is with respect to the rules of the House? Can we find a proponent for change to allow scrutiny on an unlimited basis of some departments in some forums of this House, either this Chamber or some other forum—a forum for the examination of the policies of the government, its expenditures and programs? Do I find a sympathetic ear within the government for that purpose?

Mr. Andras: Within reason, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, pursuing that line of questioning, I do not have to remind the minister about one of the most important functions of parliament, a traditional role and a very important part of our responsibility, that is, to examine the expenditures of government.

The hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) brought to the attention of the minister that in the last three years there have been examples where some departments have never had the first item of their estimates considered. One example is the Post Office. I find this to be incredible in view of the problems we have experienced with the Post Office over the past three years. When we think of the operation of that