



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/3472
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

Title:

ALP broadcast regarding 'effective circle of financial control of the expenditure of Government monies'.

Please acknowledge the source as:
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/3472

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

Good Evening,

Something that happened at the weekend gives an example of bad Government in South Australia, and how the Labor Party's proposals to deal with matters of the kind in question have been adamantly refused by Sir Thomas Playford and his band of yes men.

It has been clearly established that to safeguard the public properly there needs to be an effective circle of financial control of the expenditure of Government monies.

The Government needs to get approval for public works projects on any large scale from a Parliamentary committee which has to consider all such projects. It has to get approval of Parliament for its projected expenditure. The Auditor-General has to examine Government expenditure and see that it is authorised. But in South Australia the one thing needed to complete the circle of financial control is missing - a standing Parliamentary committee to enquire into spending to see that it is effective and efficient. Labor Party motions have been moved in the House of Assembly on numerous occasions to set up a Public Accounts Committee - they have always been voted out by Sir Thomas Playford and the dragooned minority representatives who sit behind him.

True, we may ask questions of the Premier about the Housing Trust, and of the Minister of Works about the Tramways Trust and (on behalf of his colleague in another place) the Railways Department, but they are not responsible to us for the replies that are given. They may ask the chairmen of the various trusts - electricity, housing or tramways - for a reply to the questions asked here, and if those replies come back couched in vague and general terms, as they more often than not do, the Minister is not responsible. We have not before us a witness who may be questioned in detail, and to try to cross-examine a Minister about something he receives at secondhand over a period of many months is an impossible task.

While the House has important and valuable opportunities to criticise the accounts in the course of debates, it lacks any close and continuous examination of what is being done in administration. This is particularly true in the circumstances of this State, because it has been the policy of the Government to remove from Ministerial and departmental control a considerable amount of Government activity in South Australia. No Minister is directly responsible to this House for the activities of a number of trusts.

Mr. Riches - Who is going to answer if the chimae stacks at the Port Augusta power station are not fixed?

Mr. Dunstan - Certainly not the Minister who is in the House. Obviously enough, we should have a committee which could call the responsible person before it, go into the situation there, and report to this House in detail on the evidence it has examined. It could not possibly be done under the present circumstances.

Mr. Riches - Hundreds of thousands is spent and no inquiry made.

Mr. Dunstan - The Auditor General himself has pointed out that the Housing Trust has undertaken certain activities not authorised by its legislation. Indeed, we know perfectly well that what has happened in certain circumstances is that, when the Public Works Committee has reported against a particular policy in public buildings in South Australia, the Housing Trust has then gone and erected those buildings without reference to the Public Works Committee. That is what happened at Elizabeth; the Public Works Committee voted against the building of pavilion type hospitals, so the trust itself built one at Elizabeth. The Auditor-General has pointed out that the trust's activities go beyond its powers under the legislation, but we are not in a position to question the Housing Trust in detail.

What is the circle of inancial control? The Government asks Parliament for money by way of Estimates of Expenditure, Parliament grants and appropriates the money requested in response to these Estimates, the Auditor-General controls the release of the money granted from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (or the Loan Fund) and conducts an audit of public accounts to ensure that public accounting is performed in accordance with the Audit Act, and the Auditor-General reports the results of his audit to the Parliament. That is as far as it goes in South

Australia. It is this Parliament's responsibility to refer that report to a committee on public accounts and for that committee to follow up the Auditor-General's criticisms - we cannot fully follow up the Auditor-General's criticisms in this House - and to call public officials before it to get explanations for their actions. In many cases we cannot get explanations in detail from the Ministers. It is all too easy for a Minister in this House to make replies not in detail so that we cannot adequately cross-examine him upon the details of administration within his department. Ministers can use their situation and numbers in this House to prevent members from getting replies. If they choose not to reply in detail, they do not have to. Honourable members know that is the case. Time and again members here have asked questions of the Treasurer and he has got up and made a speech on something completely different.

Mr. Riches - What do members do when money for one project is spent on another?

Mr. Dunstan - We may ask a question, but the Premier gets up and makes some broad and general reply. We cannot go into the thing in detail to see whether anything has been fully justified. We have to be able to examine and cross-examine. Indeed, authoritative works on public expenditure and its control all support the existence of a public accounts committee. This is what Mr. Basil Chubb, an authority on the subject, has to say :

"Money may be carefully appropriated and legally issued and the administration's accounts may be audited by an authority set up by Parliament (the Auditor-General), but unless Parliament is prepared to take notice of the results of such audit, these checks lack an effective sanction and are in danger of becoming meaningless forms."

We should not say, therefore, that the inquiry of the Auditor General and his report are sufficient to ensure Parliamentary financial control. We must go further.

What are we doing about the way in which our Public Service is run? Let me turn to that question and look at the Public Service Act of South Australia for a moment. Section 22 of that Act provides:-

The Commissioner shall furnish to the Governor for presentation to the Parliament at least once in each year a report on the condition and efficiency of the public service; and in such report there shall be set forth any charges and measures which the Commissioner of the board considers necessary for improving the working of the public service, and especially for insuring efficiency and economy therein or in any department thereof. The Commissioner shall also in such report draw attention to any breaches or evasions of this Act which may have come under his notice.

Where is the report for this year, for last year, the year before that, or for that matter the year before that? The last report was in 1953, and that was the first report for 12 years. Let me read the opening of the Public Service Commissioner's Report on the efficiency of the South Australia Public Service for 1953:-

"This report is the first since 1940. At that stage, as the nation was at war and there was urgent need for the conservation of manpower and materials, all except essential activities were curtailed. Although hostilities in World War II ceased in 1945 the shortage of manpower for the rapidly expanding departments of the Public Service became, if anything, more acute, and it has been found impracticable to compile a report until the present time."

That was in 1953. Strangely enough, having compiled an account in 1953 having found then that it was impracticable to do so, we have not had another report since. What is the state of the Public Service? Let me quote to honourable members from a publication that arrived in their letter boxes only this last week. This is the Public Service Review for South Australia which says :

"At the last Council meeting there was considerable discussion on the extreme difficulty experienced by members with regard to finding some of the details of matters of importance with regard to conditions of employment. One of the main matters discussed at the meeting was in connection with the various allowances."

Public Service Association complains that it is impossible to find various public service regulations as they have not been printed for years.

Now at the weekend I raised the question of the Cobalt Bombs bought for the R.A.H. you may have seen the report in the Sunday Mail.

"Two cobalt bombs costing £50,000 for treating cancer were lying idle at Royal Adelaide Hospital because the buildings housing them were not yet completed, the ALP president, Mr. Don Dunstan, said today." (No comment from the hospital)

"Leaded windows, a necessary part of the equipment had still to arrive from overseas," Mr. Dunstan said.

"One machine was imported from America nearly two years ago and the other from England early this year.

"It will probably be some months before either can be used on patients.

"Each machine is standing in a room adjoining an uncompleted one-storey building to be known as the cobalt bomb suite.

"Contractors have months of work ahead to complete the building.

"Before the cobalt bombs can be used, windows with specially leaded glass have to be constructed in the 4 ft. thick walls.

"Medical staff have to remain outside the rooms to avoid radiation and watch the patients through the windows as they receive treatment.

"The windows, which are resistant to radiation, have been ordered from overseas, but I understand they have not yet arrived.

"By the time the hospital is ready to use the cobalt

bomb from America, much of the power from the radio-active cobalt will have been lost."

"The loss is about 50 per cent in five years.

"The first bomb was stored in a disused warehouse for more than a year while the big concrete room was being built.

"Cost of recharging or replacing the wasted cobalt will be £2,000 to £3,000.

"Before the other machine was installed, part of the concrete floor of the room sank, because of water seeping underneath from the rains.

"The mountings from the five-ton machine had to be realigned before it could be assembled.

"The installation work, which should have been completed in a few weeks, took about three months.

~~The Department's answer~~

The Department's answer was this, that no patients had suffered because of the non-use of the bombs and that they would soon be in use.

But they did not explain why thousands of pounds of public money has been wasted. It is just this sort of thing that a public accounts committee could enquire into. But our dictator is not concerned to see that the public is protected. He wants to keep up the illusion that S.A. is well governed not by promoting efficiency in Government Departments, but by seeing that there is no means by which the public can find out about the inefficiencies.

Good Night.