

large amounts. But no matter at what time they are dealt with, the weakness I suggest would still be there. I am going to vote that this item before us be approved by the committee, but I am not in a position to judge whether or not the amount asked for, or an amount somewhat less, might be sufficient to carry on adequately and properly the work of the department. If I were to ask any other private member of the house whether he is in a position to determine that question, he would have to answer, no. The same applies to the vast majority of items submitted to us. How can we know? What method is there, what procedure, by which we can put ourselves in a position intelligently to vote on the amounts submitted to us? True, we can ask the minister questions, and I think all hon. members will agree that the minister now presiding has had infinite patience throughout the session in answering questions. We might ask all the questions we liked and he might answer to the best of his ability with the assistance of the officials in front of him. During the session we can put questions on the order paper or have motions passed for the production of papers and for orders for returns and all that sort of thing. But every private member will agree that these methods are cumbersome and slow and entirely inadequate for the purpose I have in mind.

It is also true that any individual member, if he has initiative and is persistent enough, may dig up a certain amount of information for himself, with regard to the administration of this, that and the other branch. But I do submit that it should not be necessary for a private member, in order to discharge the duty which he owes to those who elect him, to put himself in the unenviable position, if I may use a crude phrase, of poking his nose into the affairs of this, that and the other department. It should not be possible that members of the staff should be subjected to criticism or censure because of the suspicion that they might be supplying to private members information regarding their branch.

It is the right of every private member, more than that, it is his duty, to familiarize himself with the method by which all public money is expended. It is the right and the duty of every private member, by some regularly established procedure, to be able to judge whether or not economies and improvements are possible in the administration of any department of government for which he is asked to vote supply. If I were to ask other private members whether they think

that as regards seventy-five per cent of the items submitted to them for approval, they are able to determine whether it is possible that, with care and economy, the amount they were asked to vote might be reduced two, five, ten or twenty per cent, if they answered truthfully they would have to say no. They do not know; they are not in a position to know. Our procedure does not provide any means by which they may put themselves in that position.

This is not criticism of the government. Is it not a fact that when we vote on seventy-five per cent of these items we vote blind confidence, not just in the members of the cabinet—I have a high degree of confidence in the members of the cabinet—but blind confidence that those who are assisting and advising the cabinet, the members of their staffs, from the deputy minister down, at all times and in all things give adequate consideration to the interests of the taxpayers? This is not criticism of the government. If there is a weakness in our system the effects of that weakness will operate no matter what government is in power. Nor is this criticism of the staffs. The most efficient members of the ministers' staffs, the most valuable civil servant, valuable as he may be in carrying out the work of his department, may be, by reason of his background and training, lamentably lacking in appreciation of dollars and cents, just as in private enterprise there are many very valuable employees, highly skilled men, men indispensable to the organization in other ways, perhaps men in charge of sales or of advertising, or research, who nevertheless are likewise lamentably lacking in a conception of the value of dollars and cents, and who must be continually checked up. And private enterprise does not fail to provide that check.

In what I am saying with regard to the estimates, I am not referring of course to the great bulk of our war expenditures. We have the war expenditures committee, and it is supposed to deal with those items. Here I am dealing only with ordinary expenditures. My suggestion is that a method should be adopted by which private members will be in a position to judge intelligently on the amounts of supply submitted to them for their approval. It may be recalled that last session I took occasion, at some length and in great detail, to submit to the house examples from one small department of what I regarded as waste, inefficiency, lack of economical organization and the unnecessary expenditure of money. I do not propose to follow that course at this time. I have not done so this session.