

**Mr. Drury:** Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what kind of remark that is, other than being an endeavour to get on the record a description of intelligent people as "boneless wonders".

The suggestion made by both the hon. member for Peace River and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was that there should be consideration of the estimates of a number of departments, chosen in some way, in the committee of the whole. There should be a certain number each year so considered. The hon. member for Peace River did not explain why he would like this. His, I suppose, is the conventional wisdom that suggests that certain things can only be considered adequately in the committee of the whole or on the floor of the House and that it is impossible to have any kind of meaningful scrutiny, any kind of meaningful acquisition of information, except through an exchange of views across the floor of the House.

I myself feel that, under our committee system, there is an orderly opportunity for detailed examination and detailed scrutiny of estimates.

**Mr. Alexander:** It is all too fast.

**Mr. Drury:** In the consideration of estimates in committee, there are available for this purpose about two and a half times the number of hours that were available in the past. By referring all the estimates to committee, by abolishing the committee of supply, we have succeeded in providing more House time for the formal legislative process. At the same time, we have obtained two and a half times the amount of parliamentary time for the scrutiny of estimates than was the case in the past. I would feel reluctant to back any scheme that would diminish this level.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggested that one reason for bringing this matter back to the House was that the members—he must have meant the members of the opposition—were concerned only about seeing that there was more money for their friends, for their constituents, and, consequently, that such scrutiny can hardly be described as a scrutiny of the estimates. For instance, the Standing Committee on Agriculture presumably is not competent to examine certain estimates in a critical way. The suggestion was that opposition members were there merely to see that there was more money for their constituents; or, they would represent that they were trying to get more money for particular constituents.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Be fair; this involves all the members on both sides.

**Mr. Drury:** Well now, Mr. Speaker, I can understand the hon. member making that statement. I do not accept that all the members on both sides are engaged in that activity. I happen to be a member of the House of Commons; and, let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this has not been my object in attending parliamentary committees.

**Mr. Nowlan:** Of what committee is the minister a member?

**Mr. Drury:** I am not a member, but I have attended—

*Control of Government Expenditures*

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Has the minister been a member of any committee?

**Mr. Drury:** Yes, I have been. Not only have I been a member of a committee, I have been a member of a committee as an opposition member.

**Mr. Baldwin:** The minister is one of the Commissioners of Internal Economy. That is the committee on which he sits.

**Mr. Drury:** Mr. Speaker, the real difficulty facing members of parliament is the vast volume of business that must be accomplished in what are described as only 365 days of one year. It is a fact that all of us try to undertake perhaps more than we can accomplish. We are constantly being frustrated, not because of the lack of information, not because of any lack of energy, but because of the lack of time to do everything we want to do. The essential problem that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was raising, and that the hon. member for Peace River referred, to, was the problem of how more intelligently to allocate our limited resources of time.

The one arena in which time pressures are very great indeed is the arena of the House of Commons. I think, perhaps, better use could be made of opposition days. If anyone wished to scrutinize a particular department on a particular opposition day, this could be done. Today, for instance, if the opposition had agreed to look into a particular department and had expressed that desire, that could easily have been done. That it has not been done makes me assume that perhaps the opposition does not want to do this. The information on which intelligible and intelligent debate can be constructed is readily available, either in committee or through the committee system, where all pertinent information can be obtained quickly from knowledgeable people. I include in that term both ministers and officials. Such information is available and can be obtained in a way that it could never be obtained across the floor of the House, either in committee of supply or in committee of the whole.

Although, undoubtedly, our system is not perfect—

**Mr. Baldwin:** The minister must not say that, please!

**Mr. Drury:**—I am not persuaded that the improvements suggested either by the hon. member for Peace River or the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre constitute an improvement over what we have today.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has described our present system of scrutiny as basically the obtaining of information in relation to programs. If information is not obtained and if the scrutiny, as he put it, is perfunctory and ineffective, that can only be because those members who claim to want information cannot be bothered to go and ask for it and cannot be bothered to get it. We have made a sincere endeavour, with the help of the Public Accounts Committee, to display more information than has ever been displayed before in the printed estimates. So great is the volume of information that the hon. member for Peace River has complained he cannot lift the blue book, because there is so much information in it.