

federal-provincial conferences. At that time it was explained that he had nothing to do with the policy side, that he was concerned with the physical arrangements, with the calling of the meetings in response to decisions made by the various provincial and federal ministers, for the secretariat, for the translation facilities, and for hospitality. There is, however, as the House is well aware, a secretary now, Mr. Gordon Robertson, who has assumed a new function of secretary for federal-provincial relations. This illustrates how important this aspect of the work of the government has become.

In so far as the control of parliament is concerned, it is exercised over these activities just it is exercised over activities that do not involve agreements between the provinces and the federal government. Perhaps I could illustrate one way in which parliament controls, that is, through the approval of legislation. For example, on the Order Paper there is a bill which will alter the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. That bill will come before parliament, and the financial arrangements between the provinces and the federal government will be discussed in parliament and approved before we can enter into an agreement to amend the agreement which underpins the revenues of those provinces that have less than the national average income.

There are agreements such as the informal arrangement that has been made regarding the price of oil. These matters were debated in the House when we had a discussion on the Petroleum Administration Act. There are agreements relating to health and welfare. They are concretized, I might say, in the various expenditures to pay part of the cost of hospitalization or medicare. These are approved by parliament when the estimates of the department which enable the Minister of National Health and Welfare to carry out these undertakings are approved by parliament.

So it seems to me that parliament does exercise the same control over federal provincial arrangements as it exercises over any other activity of the federal government, whether such activity results in an agreement with a foreign country or with a province, or whether it is something that is undertaken unilaterally by the federal government itself. I do agree with the hon. member that these arrangements are of growing importance.

There is no doubt that there has been a considerable revolution in the last generation in the relations between federal and provincial governments. I can look back in my career to a time when arrangements with respect to the finances of the provinces being supported by Ottawa were undertaken in relation to the emergency of the war. These have been transformed into extremely large expenditures by the federal government to underpin the revenue of those provinces which happen to have less than the national average income. I do submit, however, that I do not think any additional scrutiny is required. When I look at the federal-provincial arrangements that are made it seems to me that all of them have been made pursuant to the approval by parliament either of the expenditures or of the underlying legislation.

Mr. McGrath: Before you call it six o'clock, Mr. Chairman, I want to point out that the minister did not answer

Business of Supply

a very important part of my question in which I asked how many departments have hidden within their estimates votes dealing with security. Perhaps later on when we resume the session he might be inclined to identify these departments.

The Deputy Chairman: May I remind the hon. member for St. John's East that the time allotted to him has expired.

It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until 8 p.m. this evening.

At six o'clock the Committee took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The Committee resumed at 8 p.m.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fox: Mr. Chairman, since 3.15 p.m. this afternoon, we are going through a so-called allotted day. As it is its right, the opposition has decided to discuss the estimates of the Prime Minister's office and the Privy Council office. Had little Alice been here today she might have thought she was back in wonderland where things seem to be what they are not, where grotesque borders on ridiculous, where reality hides behind myths, which are in turn passed for realities when realities are passed for myths.

The purpose of this allotted day is to discuss the estimates of the Prime Minister's office and the Privy Council office for this year. Listening to the learned opposition spokesmen, we find that they have in turns shouted very loudly to say that they have a basic right to ask detailed questions in order to apply a tight control on public expenditures. But this having been said, what are the fundamental questions which may be put? François Villon used to say, in his old refrain:

But where are the snows of yesteryear?

One might wonder, this debate having started as it did: But where are the questions of yesteryear? Yes, there is a clamor that the privilege of putting questions is being repressed. But the fact remains that all questions must be put if the opposition so wishes. But when it comes to putting specific questions our Don Quixotes opposite seem to transform themselves into whispering "dons". We have heard much rhetoric but few pertinent questions.

The hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark) surpassed himself when he said the Opposition exercises no control over the daily activities of the government in this House. That would constitute a terrible if not terrifying admission of weakness on the part of the Opposition. I suspect, however, that the hon. member's words went beyond his thoughts. In fact, the situation is entirely different. The Opposition knows to what extent it can delay implementation of a government legislative program through dilatory tactics. One need only look at the facts: For how long has the Opposition delayed the creation establishment of a national petroleum corporation? For how long will it continue to do so before the committee of the House considering this bill? We do not know. For how long will the Opposition continue to block the passage of