

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

suggestion, and I should like to know why this is something that my hon. friends opposite will not allow the opposition to decide. Why do they insist on jamming their views down our throats in regard to what is the role of the opposition?

This proposal would not involve extra time. Not one additional minute is involved in what I am suggesting. The government does not save one minute by doing what it is proposing compared with what we want done. When members of the government stand in this house and purport to be putting this proposal forward on the ground that it would help the opposition, then I do not think one is being too skeptical if one does wonder a little about this.

I do not want to be offensive about this, but obviously no time is saved by the government as a result of what it is proposing. In addition, it is contrary to the way that we who have the main responsibility for examining estimates want to see them examined. There is really only one belief possible for us to hold, and that is that the government wants to weaken the role of the opposition in examining estimates. If that is not the intention of the government, then let it simply indicate that it is prepared to accept the views of the opposition in regard to retaining about one-third of the departmental estimates for consideration in the house. Let us be the judge of that and it will not cost the government one additional day as far as its business schedule is concerned.

These proposals should not be viewed in isolation from other developments which together have the ominous effect of building the power of government at the expense of the individual citizen. It is important to ask the question: What kind of system are we building here? The office of the Prime Minister of Canada already involves enormous power, especially when the Prime Minister controls a majority government. The office of the Prime Minister of this country controls more power than the President of the United States in his sphere, because none of the checks and balances of the United States system are built into our constitution. All the checks and balances there have ever been in our parliamentary system have been built in here in parliament; yet this is a function that my hon. friends now wish to remove.

Indeed, it can be argued that the Prime Minister of Canada has more power in his sphere than the Prime Minister of Great Britain, even if my hon. friends wish to rely

[Mr. Stanfield.]

entirely on the argument relating to the British tradition, because in our parliament we do not have the degree of independence in our parties that is evident in Britain where frequently a large slice of a particular party votes independently of the view of the party leader or party caucus.

All of this is occurring at a time when government and society are growing more complex and the feeling of effectiveness of the individual citizen is growing smaller and smaller. The Prime Minister himself has recognized this social and psychological problem and has spoken contagiously of the prospects of involvement and participation. I must say in all frankness that these words have a hollow ring against the background of a guillotine which will even further weaken the control Canadians have over their government today.

Speaking briefly on television the other night when he was addressing the human rights conference here, the Prime Minister affirmed his belief that government must serve and protect individual citizens, and I assume the Prime Minister includes parliament in this context. Certainly that is our conviction. Other agencies exist in a free society to protect the individual against the state—the courts, the free press and some other forums. But none has the ultimate strength or sanction of parliament. And parliament has that strength only because, when the chips are down, parliament can force a government at least to delay. This proposal would deprive us of that power.

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that these gentlemen would deform parliament, not reform it. Therefore I am going to propose an amendment and I would ask the Prime Minister and the supporters of the government in this house to consider carefully our position, to consider the fact that it is so easy to destroy and to weaken and so difficult to restore and to strengthen this institution. I assure the members of this house that we on this side are anxious to co-operate in genuine reform and in measures that go to the improvement of the country. But we are not prepared to see parliament weakened. So I call upon the Prime Minister and his colleagues to consider very carefully what they are doing and also to consider very carefully the suggestions we are making.

[Translation]

Seconded by Mr. Baldwin, I move:

That the fourth report of the special committee on procedure of the house be not now concurred