

about 20 or 30 per cent of the recommendations of these committees. Then why appoint committees which are supposed to be responsible is only 30 or 40 per cent of their recommendations are considered? That becomes a monumental joke and this is why the government should find another formula. I am not against these programs in themselves; I would even wish that some of them become ongoing as I have faith in the programs implemented in my riding, for instance, particularly those for the mentally retarded. I believe that such programs should be ongoing and draw the attention of the government to the provincial and the national level. In fact, I have gone in person to see some of these programs for the mentally retarded being carried out and it was quite a revelation for me. I visited a group of handicapped persons whom I had never met before as they were too isolated. There were about 20 or 30 of them and I spent two hours there. When you see these people working it is incredible what they can accomplish. When you have spent two hours with them you forget that they are handicapped for they are overjoyed at being useful members of society.

I believe that the minister responsible for the LIP program should take the trouble to study projects such as these which could contribute something and, in time, produce concrete results which will benefit the entire population. I believe that such programs cannot be condemned by anyone but special legislation is needed to regulate them. As for me, I support the hon. member's motion calling for the adoption of such special legislation to establish a nationwide program.

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. H. T. Herbert (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker, I feel this debate has degenerated into a discussion of the merits of LIP and OFY. It is strange it should have done so, because the mover of the motion did argue that long-term planning should replace short-term measures. Then, later in the discussion, he did agree that such programs as LIP were necessary in times of pressing need. I suggest both these programs are poor examples, inasmuch as they are short-term programs which would not fall within the terms of the motion now under discussion. I would prefer to stay with the terms of the motion as drawn up.

I can appreciate the concern of the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) as suggested in his motion, but I would like to expand further upon the opportunities available to parliament for the review of legislative matters which are contained in Appropriation Acts, keeping in mind the need to ensure that the limited time available to this House for legislative debate is used for those matters which are of the greatest importance to the nation.

I would also like to remind the House that this is not really a new issue. The use of Appropriation Acts for legislative items has been discussed a number of times before, both in this House and in the other place. In these discussions, the need to conserve the valuable time of parliament has usually been given high importance.

As hon. members know, the conservation of parliamentary time was a major factor in the adoption of revised standing orders for this House in October, 1969. One of the

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key features of those revisions was the method of dealing with supply bills. The introduction of a detailed review of estimates by the various standing committees was a substantial improvement, in my opinion. Also the standing orders provide ample time for committee consideration of estimates. If I may, I will quote paragraph 14 of section 58 of the standing order:

In every session the main estimates to cover the incoming fiscal year for every department of government shall be referred to standing committees on or before March 1 of the then expiring fiscal year. Each such committee shall consider and shall report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the same back to the House not later than May 31 in the then current fiscal year.

This rule guarantees at least three full months in which the various committees may study the main estimates. This provides extensive opportunity for members to examine in detail the various aspects of those new programs provided in estimates which would be covered by the motion we are considering today. Ministers may be questioned. Officials and outside authorities may be called. Departments may be asked for written replies to questions.

This spring, opposition members had the opportunity to examine the recently passed 1973-74 main estimates at 177 meetings of our various committees. The total time expended was the equivalent of 80 days of debate in this House. These main estimates contain more than 1,200 pages of detail. I was surprised to hear the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich say he could not vote against item 10 in the estimates of the President of Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) because it contained other provisions with which he was in agreement. He probably has not heard that hon. members may move to reduce items with which they disagree, should they wish to do so, by presenting a motion. This brings the matter into the House for discussion.

In the estimates which have been tabled there are about 150 items of an amount exceeding \$5 million. I suggest it might be a considerable task to determine which of these 150 items fall within the scope of the motion under discussion. I also suggest that, since we have some 15 or more committees to discuss these items which have no theoretical limit on the amount of time they want to spend during the three months, period of allotted time for discussion, there is all the time in the world for debate that anyone might require.

● (1750)

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) referred to the inadequacy of committee discussion and in fact suggested that this motion would not solve the problem. He suggest there should be an improvement in the committee system. I suggest that there is a tendency in setting times for committee meetings to take into account the fact that there should not be a meeting on Monday because some hon. members will not be back, and we should not set meetings for Friday because hon. members want to get away. I have heard all kinds of excuses from members in the opposition as to why we should not have committee meetings. There were some 177 meetings in the spring during which members had the opportunity to discuss the estimates, and this time could easily have been doubled if opposition members had so wished.