

*The Address—Mr. Fleming*

or their children who have derived a rich culture from other lands. Therefore, sir, I hope that with those newcomers to our land, whatever be their racial or ethnic origin, we shall be enabled, with the strength that they bring to this land, to build here a greater and freer Canada.

Now a word about the conduct of business in the house at this session. It is well that in this traditional debate on the speech from the throne we give thought to the machinery of the house, and the ways and means by which the house may seek to improve the methods by which it discharges public business. I have always felt that at all times, without sacrificing the dignity of the house, we should seek to expedite proceedings and to achieve greater efficiency in the dispatch of public business. It will be no surprise, therefore, when I come back to a theme on which the house has listened to me before, namely, the necessity for a greater extension of the use of committees.

It is high time the procedure of the house was modernized. We are labouring today—and I use the word advisedly—under the handicap of antiquated procedure. It is high time we undertook resolutely to streamline house procedure, and I believe it can be done without sacrificing in any way the essential rights of hon. members.

Let me say in the first place that I am not going to repeat the arguments I used in the last session by pointing out how many of the standing committees have not been meeting for years, and could be dispensed with in favour of new committees which would deal with questions arising every day, and which the house can deal with adequately only through committees.

One of the most important and primary duties of the House of Commons is to scrutinize expenditures—not just after they are made, but to scrutinize the requests coming from the government for the provision of funds for future expenditures. Therefore I say the time has long passed when the house should set up a committee or committees on estimates. As all hon. members know, under our present clumsy and awkward procedure it is quite impossible to scrutinize estimates or derive needed information in a proper fashion. It can be obtained only at second hand from ministers, and without any opportunity of getting down to details of expenditure. Under these circumstances it is impossible to discharge our duties of supervising and controlling public expenditures.

Already we have a useful precedent in the standing committee on external affairs—and I hope that committee will be set up again at

an early date, and that the minister will follow the excellent procedure he followed last year of coming before the committee for more detailed discussion of Canada's external relations than is possible in debates in the house. That committee has had referred to it in each of the last three years the estimates of the Department of External Affairs. It is only fair to say that the estimates of that department have had a better and a more understanding scrutiny than have those of any other department, owing to the fact that in committee it is possible to review estimates in detail, and to elicit firsthand information.

Hon. members will recall the debate on this subject on October 26 last year in which, during a useful discussion as to the methods of reviewing expenditures, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) said, as reported at page 1159 of *Hansard*:

I must say I do not think the House of Commons satisfactorily discharges its responsibility of examining in detail the estimates of proposed expenditures for a year.

And again at page 1173, at the conclusion of the discussion, he said:

I want to conclude by saying that I think we have had a most helpful discussion. I do not think members of the committee expect me to express any specific views as to the different suggestions that have been made, but—

And this is the part I would stress.

—I shall be very glad to consider, between now and the next session, what the government might do to expedite the efficient study of the estimates. I think with the co-operation of all parties we should be able to effect some improvement in our system.

Some improvement in the system is urgently needed. I therefore look forward with interest to hearing from the government its concrete proposals for the improvement of that system.

Some are saying that the committee on public accounts is a committee which could undertake this task. If I may say so, that is a complete misconception. The public accounts committee is established for the purpose of reviewing expenditures that have been made. What is needed in this instance is a committee which will review estimates of expenditures before the house makes the money available to the government.

I shall not dwell upon these other matters, because the suggestions have been put forward and debated by others. A committee on national defence is urgently required today, as is also a standing committee on veterans affairs. We require, too, a standing committee on social security—none of your special or mushroom committees, but a standing committee. As has been recommended on several occasions in recent sessions by the special committee on radio broadcasting and