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Canadians for the very substantial amounts of money that it wishes to spend.

However, there is, in this case, a big difference between theory and practice. In fact, because of its majority, the government controls the election of the committee chairmen, who are responsible for scheduling meetings to consider the Estimates.

• (1735)

I must say I am extremely concerned and disappointed when I see how some committee chairmen show so little interest in considering the Estimates for their departments. I have some statistics which I could table or send to anyone who is interested in the attendance of committee members or the interest of committees in reviewing expenditures. In fact, the Public Accounts Committee, which I have the pleasure to chair, is the only committee chaired by a member of the opposition. All other committees are usually chaired by a government member.

Now if we look at the statistics for these committees, they are really not impressive. We are talking about major departments like Indian Affairs, Agriculture Canada, Finance, Forestry and Fisheries, National Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Senior Citizens, Status of Women, and I could go on with the Department of Transport and Official Languages. These parliamentary committees have shown very little interest in the main estimates for their departments or agencies in the years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

As for the 1993-94 main estimates we are being asked to approve today, the record is not particularly impressive. The Standing Committee on Finance, for instance, an important committee of the House which is responsible for examining the votes of the Department of Finance and the Department of National Revenue, representing a total of several billion dollars, did not bother to examine the votes at all. This is indeed a sad commentary.

The Energy, Mines and Resources Committee and the Transport Committee, both very important, did not meet once to examine the estimates. I think this is a major flaw in our parliamentary system that affects the government's accountability to the House of the Commons. I am sorry to say this, but it is irresponsible of members to

criticize the government if they fail to provide for thorough scrutiny of the government's estimates, of its spending plans.

Today, only the Conservative members of this House are suicidal enough, if I may use the term, to vote in favour of a motion like the one we have before us today, a request for \$161 billion, without prior review of the impact of government spending plans. This is like giving the government a blank cheque. I am not prepared to do that, Mr. Speaker, even if I am in the opposition. I am not prepared to give the executive, the Conservative government in power today, a blank cheque for \$161 billion without thorough scrutiny and without ensuring that both transparency and accountability have been part of the process.

I believe I have every reason to say this. When considering the Public Accounts for the fiscal year that has just ended, I saw that the tax provisions for foreign corporations cost Canada hundreds of millions of dollars in foregone revenue. No taxes were paid, even when companies made sizable profits. They did not pay taxes because of loopholes in our tax legislation. What they are doing is not illegal, not against the letter of law, but it is certainly against the intent of the law, as I see it.

According to the Public Accounts, the cost of implementing the GST, which was prohibitive, totalled \$1.7 billion, including \$808 million in start-up costs and \$900 million for transitional credits. The Prosperity Secretariat awarded 22 contracts for a total value of \$3.3 million without public tenders. This is very disturbing, but no one queried this. Sixty-five million dollars in pension payments went to recipients who were not entitled to these payments. Extra amounts granted in 1989-90 for the Canada Student Loans Program may cost us \$39 million. Canadians do not realize this, but Canadian students owe the Canadian government \$1.088 billion. It bothers me that we are being asked to approve a major bill involving \$161 billion and that the members of this House did not take the time, in my opinion, to examine this information carefully. Actually, the government is asking us to hold our noses and vote for the bill. I am not prepared to do that. In fact, the government wants to be absolved of its sins without benefit of confession. In the circumstances, I am certainly not prepared to support this bill.