

Northern Power Commission Act

committee or commission he is confessing that he, as a minister, as a member of the cabinet, who is supposed to be responsible to parliament and hence to the people, has in fact no such control or authority. Each time this occurs the parliamentary process suffers. We saw an instance of this today, following another example yesterday of the problem parliament encounters in terms of control over public funds—control over the estimates. There was an admission by a minister of the Crown that the estimates which come before parliament may not be true, at least in terms of dealing with the objectives of different expenditures. Yet this is all part of the process of examining estimates, the process of examining the programs which are undertaken.

● (1700)

For the first time a minister of the Crown yesterday indicated that some of the estimates are wrong. This was done in the interests of national security, and I think that is a legitimate interest for this parliament to be concerned with, Mr. Speaker.

However, the system suffers as a result of failure to disclose, and I am happy that at least some movement has been made by the Minister of Science and Technology (Mr. Drury) to afford an opportunity of some kind—not perhaps the kind he spoke of on the floor of the House, but at least of some kind—to review those estimates. I think there was in that the recognition that albeit national security is important there must be weighed against that the importance of parliament knowing, parliament disclosing, and parliament dealing with the affairs of people, rather than have such matters hived off somewhere where no one could reach them even through the estimates.

The amendment we are dealing with expresses more than anything else the concern of many members of this institution, regardless from what party they come, that gradually and surely our powers as members of parliament are being eroded, and that parliament itself is suffering.

The present House leader of the government deserves a tremendous amount of credit for taking up the cudgels in regard to the return to this chamber of consideration of the estimates. This has been argued for by many parliamentarians over the years. Just recently we have approved a system that will give this parliament for the first time a new kind of look into the estimates. This is a temporary arrangement, but I hope it will be the beginning of some new procedure.

I think it is in that direction that all statute law ought to turn. It is in the direction of the strengthening of parliament that the attention of the government ought to be turned so as to make the institution of parliament truly representative of the people. Then members of parliament, as representatives of the people, will have the opportunity to deal in this place with the operations of government in every department.

I think the proposal of the government in regard to this particular bill does not do this, and basically that is the concern of the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) as well as of the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain. It should be the concern of all of us that when we are tempted from time to time to answer problems in a sophis-

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

ticated society by forming another board or commission, instead of leaving them within the parliamentary process, we should resist that temptation. This is an opportunity for this chamber to resist a similar temptation.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, earlier this day I undertook to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) to introduce a motion to refer the Hermann commission report to the committee on veterans affairs. I therefore ask permission of the House to revert to motions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that the House revert to motions?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

REFERENCE OF REPORT TO STANDING COMMITTEE

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council) moved:

That the report to the Minister of Veterans Affairs on Canadians who were prisoners of war in Europe during World War II by Douglas Hermann, M.D. be referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, while we are still on motions, I should like to call the motion standing in my name regarding the adjournment of the House.

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[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

EASTER RECESS

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council) moved:

That when the House adjourns on Wednesday, March 26, 1975, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, April 7, 1975, provided that at any time prior to that date, if it appears to the satisfaction of Mr. Speaker, after consultation with the Government, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time during the adjournment, Mr. Speaker may give notice that he is so satisfied, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice, and shall transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time; and

That, in the event of Mr. Speaker's being unable to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker or the Deputy Chairman of Committees shall act in his stead for all purposes of this order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the House agree to adopt the motion?

[English]

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that I would not be on my feet for this debate, which is normally one that all members hope will be