

armed with sufficient professional staff and facilities to make it possible to report to the House by a date which would allow time for a mandatory debate. There should also be in the standing orders a provision that the chairman of the committee bring before the House the report of the committee for its consideration; the opposition would then have the right to move an amendment or call attention to any shortcomings which in its opinion showed that the government was failing to carry out its duties properly, or failing to pay attention to the recommendations of the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee. This should be mandatory, and these proceedings should be carried out in the full glare of publicity, attended by live television and radio. I might add that the government should have the right to table its response in advance so that we might engage in a debate with the issues clearly defined.

I suggest, finally, that an attempt should be made by the government to eliminate some of the practices to which I referred earlier in my remarks. There is no reason these things should be so esoteric. Consider the extent to which the people of this country are involved in the escalating cost of living. It has been said by the Economic Council of Canada and by a great many others that as far as domestic issues are concerned, the increasing cost of government constitutes the largest element in the present inflationary process. I think this statement is accepted in all circles. It is essential that this House show the people of Canada a determination to grasp this nettle and deal with it. No better way can be found to do that than by this government indicating to this House and the country its recognition of the problems, its defects of the past, and its preparedness to accept some of the proposals I am sure will emanate from this side of the House before the debate is concluded.

● (1230)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. C. M. Drury (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first occasion, as the mover of the motion has recalled to us, on which the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has moved a motion along the lines of the one we are now debating. Almost exactly a year ago he expressed similar concern in almost the same terms, lacking some of the suggestions he included in today's remarks.

I should like to be able to think that the hon. member is showing only a general, highminded and meritorious concern for the principles upon which our parliamentary system is founded, a concern which I am sure is shared by all members. I should like to believe so, but I cannot leave it at that when I study his motion which presents a charge so much at variance with the facts. I could try to excuse him on the grounds that he has not had an opportunity to be informed, but last year and on other occasions it has been my lot to reply to motions on this subject that he or his colleagues have placed before this House.

Mr. Baldwin: I am still uninformed.

Mr. Drury: I have, in the clearest and simplest terms, attempted to allay any real concern he may have felt. Had I not done so, and had no member of this government

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spoken about the matter, the evidence of what this government had done should have been enough to show him that he was the victim of unfounded fears.

An hon. Member: Let's have a look at the evidence.

Mr. Drury: In the face of this evidence and in spite of what he has been told, he continues on the same theme. I can only conclude that he has some deep-seated paranoia, however vague his apprehension of the cause of it, and the best that can be done is to try again to set him at ease by again reciting the facts. I must reach this charitable conclusion about his inability to see and grasp reality to avoid the contrary conclusion that he is being irresponsible and partisan.

Let me again go through the record as I have on previous occasions. When the present government assumed office in 1968, it had as one of its priorities the up-dating of a financial apparatus very much unsuited to the needs of a contemporary government and a contemporary parliament. We had a system that had originated, in many respects, in times when governments had a very narrow role to play in a society of a much less complex sort. It was a system that had hardly been altered in a fundamental way for more than three decades.

In particular, parliament was annually being presented with the government's expenditure proposals in a style reminiscent of these earlier simpler times. This style of presentation heaped detail upon detail with little apparent structure. Parliament, as is evidenced by the debates of those days, turned away from the actual and factual consideration of the estimates. It used the days on which estimates were scheduled for study much as this day is being used, in treating topics in a very general way.

I want to ask hon. members to recall that period of last January in which we reverted in a substantial measure, because of unusual circumstances, to the procedures of earlier days as we dealt with the first supplementary estimates for 1972-73. There were relatively few items in those estimates.

Mr. Baldwin: But oh, what estimates!

Mr. Drury: All of them were concerned with matters of urgency and, I believe it fair to say, all were quite straightforward.

An hon. Member: Oh, come on.

Mr. Drury: If hon. members were to examine the debate over the many days that this House was occupied with those estimates they would find that the House dealt with the matter and substance of the items in the estimates hardly at all. Instead, hon. members engaged in general discussion of general topics, proving again that the floor of the House of Commons is not a practicable forum for the detailed examination of expenditures.

To revert to the situation as it was assessed in 1968, the government undertook to pursue vigorously the investigations that had been going on under the previous Liberal administration into modern developments in government budgeting systems. Steps were taken to bring these investigations to a head; to effect radical changes and to put into effect new forms of documentation and new proce-