

that this institution will always be difficult to operate because of that diversity.

[*Translation*]

I would like to separate my comments on parliamentary reform into four parts. First, I believe that there are certain reforms or changes which would be easy to bring about that concern our everyday life as parliamentarians. When I say this, I mean among other things our trips to our constituencies and our families. I would simply like to point out that situations where surprise votes may be called at just about any time do not lead to a parliamentary way of life that should be acceptable today. As recently as this week, I twice had to cancel elaborate plans for meetings in my constituency with groups who wanted to consult with me. This is very important for a Member of Parliament, and twice I had to revise my plans simply because my whip told me that I had to be in Ottawa lest there should be a vote. This is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, and in a country as large as Canada, in a country where the federal government is losing its credibility in certain areas, it is very important for Members of Parliament to be mobile. In order to maintain efficient political and public relations, it is most important for a Member of Parliament, when he has told a chamber of commerce, a municipal council or an industrial commission, that he will meet them at a certain time on a certain date, that he should not have to change his plans two or three times in the same week, simply because there can be surprise votes in the House.

It seems to me that nothing should prevent us from making plans and if this recent crisis should give us the opportunity to effect some changes, I believe that we sought to start by trying to update our system. I am willing to leave in our procedures sufficient latitude for the official opposition to delay the work of the House in one way or another. I believe that we need loopholes here and there for the opposition and even backbenchers to delay the work of Parliament. I do not think that we can realistically expect the Canadian Parliament to have a system completely free of such loopholes.

However, Mr. Speaker, I believe that, in a modern Parliament, we should eliminate the problems of session adjournments, surprise votes and bells which can ring for nights without anyone knowing whether or not the vote will be held, and I believe that this could easily be the first stage of our parliamentary reform. The second issue that I want to raise is the consideration of budgetary estimates, and the third is the handling of legislation. I shall deal with both of them at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, traditionally, and this is important in my view, Parliament votes the estimates in order that the government may govern. Over the years, as mentioned by the previous speaker, we went into Committee of the Whole and ministers were summoned here, on the floor. Members could ask questions, they could delay matters as long as they wished. This was changed in 1969, I was here at the time, so that the estimates could be referred to committee and we could have a

*Supply*

specific date on which the estimates are deemed to have been reported by committee, even if the latter refuses to do so.

• (2100)

Mr. Speaker, the old custom is worth while, but it is preposterous to suggest that members of Parliament should scrutinize in detail the estimates each year in order to hold government accountable with the means at our disposal. It is not done, because it is not possible in a modern society. We now have accounting methods that were lacking previously. We have computers, we have the Auditor General, we have a Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and I feel, Mr. Speaker, that one of the things we should seriously consider—the hon. member for Rosemont (Mr. Lachance) raised this issue in the motion tabled on February 25, I believe, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend him for that as well as for his speech this afternoon, because I think he has a very considered approach, that of changing the procedure for consideration of the estimates with a view to making government accountable to Parliament.

[*English*]

I believe the kind of examination of estimates we have now is a total waste of time. It is boring for members of the government. It is a boring exercise for us, and a frustration for members in the opposition. We assume it is necessary in a modern society to make a detailed yearly examination of estimates, but it is humanly impossible.

What I would rather like to see, if I had a choice—and here I come close to what my colleague, the hon. member for Rosemont, proposed this afternoon and proposed in his resolution of February 25—is that we give the opportunity to small groups of Members of Parliament in special committees of the House, with the appropriate staffs, to pick five-year plans of departments. We do not change the notion of accountability of ministers, but the mere fact that we are going to look at five-year plans automatically puts an onus on officials to account. Ministers, technically, will have to account, but then those committees can put departments to the test for one year, with the appropriate staffs, and really grill certain departments and find out where they are going in the long term. That is better accountability than what we have now, which is really an exercise in frustration for everybody. It is a waste of time, and we should not even pretend we are examining the estimates of the departments. Officials do not have to account because they know all they have to do is give long answers and the bell will ring at eleven o'clock, and by a certain date the matter has to be reported. I suppose in a technical or parliamentary sense it is still some kind of examination. The government still has the confidence of the House of Commons. We on the Liberal side could decide that estimates are bad, and we could kick the government out. Right now six or seven Liberal Members of Parliament could, I suppose, force the government to change its mind, but that would really not be a proper examination of a department.