

*Parliament*

The United States is a country which has much wider military obligations than we have, but Congress has striven to acquire some control over this spending. As I have pointed out, we seem to have no control whatsoever in that respect.

What is true with regard to defence is true with regard to many other fields. I want to emphasize that it is true with regard to military matters. I spoke to a well-known Conservative, who shall be nameless, a day or two ago. Since he and other members of the Conservative party had been saying that they want to scrutinize all expenditures with great care and cut out what we do not need, I asked him why he did not look at this program for acquiring fighter aircraft. "Oh," he said, "the military has decided that. I take its advice".

I think the same tendency exists within the government. That is an abdication from the principle of parliamentary authority. The military does not have sole control over matters of this kind. If there is any doubt about that, I would like to read something the Minister of National Defence said when Colonel Painchaud was fired, if that is what happens in the army when one loses his job.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Sacked.

**Mr. Brewin:** He was sacked. He was fired. He was the commander of the crack Canadian Airborne Regiment. He dared to criticize the Minister of National Defence, something I do on occasion. The minister at that time said this:

—essential point which we must never, ever forget—that in a democracy it is civilian control of the military.

We owe a lot to the military . . . but it is fundamental in our type of society that the policy and direction is in civil hands, those of the elected representatives.

That has been said by many others. It is the basis of our system. Therefore, I say that the general rule which I have propounded of adequate scrutiny applies as much to military matters as it does to anything else.

I will conclude by saying that we are not dealing with an unimportant matter. It is very important. It goes to the root of the parliamentary system of which we are part. I think most of us are proud to be part of it. We want to see this parliament function, and we want to see it exercise the authority given to it by the people and by the Constitution of Canada.

● (2132)

The present manner in which estimates are being handled is a failure. I do not join in any wholesale condemnation of the government. I do not think the present government is much worse or better than others we have had. Parliament should attempt to clarify and strengthen the means of control over public expenditures. That is the essence of this motion, and that is why we support it.

**Mr. James Gillies (Don Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have an opportunity to rise for a moment or two to speak on the motion before the House. It is one of the most important motions which have been put before the House of Commons in a long, long time. Every member of parliament, if he is serious about this institution and about representing his

[Mr. Brewin.]

constituents, must look at this motion with a great deal of care.

Canada has a very unique form of government. The British parliamentary system operates without internal checks and balances. The fundamental manner in which the British parliamentary system operates allows the opposition to hold the government in check by not accepting its supply. The only manner in which that can be done effectively is for the opposition to have complete control over the examination of estimates.

For at least a decade, opposition members of parliament have not had such an opportunity. Every single member should know that the reputations of members of parliament and this institution perhaps have never been lower in the estimation of Canadians than it is at the present time.

Why is that true? It is because the government has emasculated a fundamental operation of parliament, that of control of the estimates. When a member of parliament is elected, his constituents think that he will take care of the taxpayers' dollar. We are here in a trustee relationship; we are trustees of taxpayers' money. Any government which refuses to permit members to perform that function attacks the fundamental institution of democracy, not a political party or individuals. Democracy is a very, very fragile form of government. It depends upon the rule of law and respect for our institutions.

In the last 15 years, the government has refused to change and modify the manner in which parliament operates. Its failure to bring in rules respecting estimates has done more to destroy respect for parliament, and therefore democracy, than anything else which has happened since confederation. All we have going for us in this critical period of time is the institution of parliament. Any government that attacks the manner in which we are permitted to operate is affecting the heart and soul of this country.

The motion before us is not a trivial one. Every member of parliament has a responsibility to look at it. He should examine his conscience as to the manner in which he will vote. Over the last decade there has been a decline in the entire institution of parliament. I do not say this entirely pejoratively. If one asks the majority of Canadians today if there is the same high standard of responsibility on the part of ministers of the Crown as traditionally expected in the British parliamentary system, they would say no. If they were asked whether the principle of candid solidarity as the framework in which to operate is working they would say no.

Most Canadians would not know why there is so little respect for this institution, but they know something has gone wrong. Perhaps Canadians think that no one in the House really cares about the manner in which their money is spent, or really protects their money from being wasted. Perhaps they were appalled that estimates in the amount of approximately \$48 billion were passed in a half hour or so, yet no one really knows what is contained in the estimates. There is no system in place so that taxpayers will receive anything like a fair break regarding the manner in which their dollars are spent.