

*Control of Government Expenditures*

fact, it blames us but without stating precisely in which area we have failed to do our duty and caused waste.

I thought that the basic role of Parliament was to approve budget expenditures. However, it seems that the opposition does not agree with Parliament sovereignty, with the adoption of its estimates and when I notice that the motion refers to waste I believe that today is a total loss since I doubt we can reach our objective by debating such a motion.

The opposition might have moved a more flexible and more accurate motion aimed at a specific department, blaming it for its management and proving it. It would have been much easier for the party in power to defend its position.

I do not think we can defend ourselves in any area when the government is condemned for mismanagement in such general terms. In my opinion, Parliament should be blamed since it is its responsibility to approve the country's expenditures. If waste does exist, Parliament should be blamed for it and, of course, that includes opposition members.

Parliament is also urged to take steps but I do not know which steps we could take to improve the study of the estimates. I do not believe that the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin)—whom I hold in high esteem—is suggesting that every member of the House should be an auditor on the same basis as the Auditor General. Someone is policing the government's expenditures and I do not think it would be in order for hon. members to interfere in the Auditor General's work or to take his place by themselves becoming auditors.

In that case, it would be very difficult, if we spend more time than we do now dealing with the estimates, to pass legislation to improve the standard of living of the people.

The Auditor General, in his report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1970, page 1, describes his terms of reference as follows:

The Auditor General shall report annually to the House of Commons the results of his examinations and shall call attention to every case in which he has observed that

- (a) any officer or employee has wilfully or negligently omitted to collect or receive any money belonging to Canada,
- (b) any public money was not duly accounted for and paid into the Consolidated Revenue Fund,
- (c) any appropriation was exceeded or was applied to a purpose or in a manner not authorized by Parliament,
- (d) an expenditure was not authorized or was not properly vouched or certified,
- (e) there has been a deficiency or loss through the fraud, default or mistake of any person, or
- (f) a special warrant authorized the payment of any money,

and to any other case that the Auditor General considers should be brought to the notice of the House of Commons.

I think then that the terms of reference of the Auditor General are clear enough and I believe that neither the motion now before us nor the amendment can significantly contribute to the control of government expenses since there is already an agency entrusted with this particular job which operates conscientiously considering the results of its work and its annual reports. I am referring to the Committee on Public Accounts which is under the chairmanship of a member of the opposition.

[Mr. Leblanc (Laurier).]

Since 1968, two important changes have occurred in the procedure for reviewing estimates: First, all estimates are referred to committees and second, as was mentioned earlier by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), there has been a revamping of the estimates form of presentation. This form of presentation has been studied in depth by the Committee on Public Accounts and the present one has been unanimously approved.

Prior to 1968, a committee, known to this House as the committee on supply, used to meet in the House itself. Almost 200 hours could be allotted to reviewing the estimates.

Today, the opposition complains that it has less time to carry out this review. I have made some calculations myself which I would like to convey to the House, proving that today the opposition, besides the 25 days allotted to them to debate supply, can still manage to spend 1,248 hours on this review. This, is how this result has been obtained: Sixteen committees sitting at least twice a week will be studying the estimates according to the orders of the day, which makes 32 meetings of roughly three hours each, that is to say 96 hours; if those committees sit during the months of February, March, April and May, 13 weeks all told, this comes up to a total of 1,248 hours of work allotted to the estimates.

Furthermore, of the 16 committees, two include 30 members and 14 include 20 members, which adds up to 340 members. In other words, some members will evidently have to sit on more than one committee, as indeed I and several of my colleagues and hon. members of the opposition do.

All hon. members who sit on committees are able to ask questions from officials and ministers who appear before them to explain the basis and the objectives of the estimates. I do not see how a member of the House can complain of being unable to study the estimates, for he has every opportunity of doing so. If a minister is called upon to give evidence before a committee and there is not enough time for hon. members to ask questions about the estimates under consideration, the minister and the public servants accompanying him are recalled by the committee—the committee comprising representatives of the opposition parties and of the government party—in order to comment on those estimates.

• (1740)

Therefore, I do not see why there are complaints, Mr. Speaker. One should make a distinction between consideration of the general estimates, which are tabled in February, and the supplementary estimates, which are tabled twice a year, that is in March and in December. This difference being taken into account, we might have to increase the number of sessions if we want to be able to consider everything that is referred to this committee.

As chairman of the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates, I think I have reasons to believe that hon. members, even those on the government side, sometimes show indifference when time comes to study estimates. In the past, the committee sat when only four hon. members of a total of 20 were present including only one opposition member. Some will complain that there is not enough time to consider the estimates. That is beyond my under-