

the present time I say we are not equipped adequately to discharge. In the annual report of the auditor general attached to the public accounts for the year ended March 31, 1946, you will find this sentence at page 17:

Parliament's control over public money is, to a degree, dependent on the efficiency employed in calculating estimates.

We are reminded from time to time that the ultimate responsibility for the expenditure of money rests on parliament. At the present time the procedure provided for carrying out that task is not one that permits parliament to discharge that duty efficiently or adequately. We are provided with estimates which give us, by way of information, simply the amount provided by parliament the previous year by way of estimated expenditure. We are not given the actual expenditure. There is not one member of this house who, if he were conducting the affairs of a business, would undertake to prepare his budget of expenditure for the succeeding year without having before him the actual expenditure of the preceding year; or if he is preparing his budget of expenditure before the end of the year, he would at least have the actual expenditure up to the date of making his estimates and the estimated expenditure for the remainder of the year. Parliament is not given to that.

Mr. MARTIN: All the hon. gentleman has to do is ask the question.

Mr. FLEMING: I am coming to that. I have been talking up to the moment about the form of the estimates themselves, which is not adequate to permit parliament to do its duty in respect of a review of the estimates under the present procedure. If we are not to be given in the book of estimates more information about actual expenditure, then a different procedure must be provided for the review of estimates.

We derive little or no help from the actual report of the department. Here we are in June, 1947, asked to vote sums of money for this department in excess of \$308,000,000; actually, including the items for demobilization and reconversion, we are being asked to provide about \$320,000,000, which is a tidy sum. Yet the last report we have—and this is no greater criticism of this department than of any other department of government—on the operations of this department is for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1946, a year which ended sixteen and a half months ago. No business could be operated by way of budgeting, on the colossal scale on which parliament is being asked to budget, with stale information like that.

What is the method by which parliament can seek to do its duty in respect of estimates, in the face of the handicaps I have mentioned? It is obvious that we must devise a different procedure. What I am saying in regard to the estimates of this department will apply equally, I think, to the estimates of almost every other department, with one exception, External Affairs. What I say is needed, both for the purpose of reviewing the estimates of this important department and for the review of other matters in relation to health and welfare in Canada, is a standing committee of this house. This is not the first time I have put this proposal forward. I have had a motion to this effect on the order paper, but like many other private members' resolutions it will probably be reached about 1960.

Mr. MACKENZIE: You won't be here.

Mr. FLEMING: I do not doubt that a good many hon. members opposite won't be here then, but I think those in this quarter of the house will have overflowed to the other side, and will be occupying the government benches for a long period. As I say, what is badly needed in our structure at the present time is a standing committee which will have jurisdiction to review matters pertaining to health, welfare, social security and housing. Definitely, housing ought to be included within the scope of that committee. We badly need a committee that can review housing and inquire into conditions and remedies; and that is the kind of committee which should be set up for this purpose. At the present time, we have what is called the voluntary health committee of both houses. It does good work within a limited sphere; I am not decrying the useful work done by that committee, but it is not an official body. It is not a standing committee of the house, and it cannot undertake the tasks which I submit such a committee ought to undertake.

It is no answer to say that we have many other committees of this house. I am tired of hearing that answer given by those on the government benches. We have a number of committees, but that is no answer to the fact that there is great need for a committee of this kind. I think we might very well abolish some of these other committees and make way for one that will be alive and will do needed work in these fields. Some of the committees we have at the present time just do not meet. Some of them have not met since this parliament opened. Is it not about time that the organization of this house was recast and some attempt made to modernize the procedure of this house and our committee