

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

regular opportunities to debate the issues of its choice.

● (8:40 p.m.)

Thirdly, is the house giving enough careful attention to the spending estimates? Or is it true that for the most part the house has abandoned the task of controlling departmental expenditures to the Treasury Board, and that members use the estimates debate mainly to show their constituents that they have demanded new expenditures on their behalf, and this generally without any real hope that those expenditures will be made? Everybody knows that politicians must not forget their constituents. But my question remains: Under our procedures are the estimates examined with sufficient care?

Fourthly, what about the bills that we do pass? Are they examined thoroughly? Or do we spend our time on the politically exciting parts, and for the rest rely on civil servants and draftsmen?

We are all here as party politicians; yet we have a more fundamental responsibility to this house and to the people. I ask myself if our present procedures do not encourage even the most conscientious members to be good politicians first, and good members of the House of Commons in a secondary way. To all of these questions I fear anyone familiar with our present system would have to give negative answers.

Reform in our rules should aim toward certain goals:

First, a regular legislative session with opportunity to examine systematically an entire legislative program;

Second, regular opportunities throughout the session for the opposition to debate the issues of its choice; and

Third, thorough examination of all the estimates and of each public bill.

This is certainly not the first time that these questions have been considered by members of this house. It is not the first time that these goals have been set up. Members will have noticed a close resemblance, for example, between the recommendations in the present reports and those of the special committee on procedure established during the last session. Those reports were produced and adopted after careful study which included an examination of current practices in the United Kingdom parliament.

Last September the government was prepared to propose to the house changes based on the work done by that committee and

[Mr. Trudeau.]

other committees in previous years. We considered, however, that the whole problem should be referred once again to a committee of the house. The house appointed a committee on September 24. That committee has gone into the problem intensively and it has now reported back to the house.

Before turning to the reports themselves I should like to mention some general considerations which must govern any set of rules we can devise. "Had we but world enough and time", mused Andrew Marvell. Although he was a member of the English house of commons he probably did not have his mind on his parliamentary duties when he wrote that line; but some imperatives apply to legislators as well as to lovers.

Obviously, there are limits to the number of days and hours available for the sittings of this house in any year. Each year the pressures of more business, of increasingly complex business, push harder against those limits. As members, we are faced with a double challenge: We must get through a larger volume of business, and we must examine the individual items in greater detail.

It is easy to agree that the situation demands better planning and a more systematic apportionment of our time. It is more difficult, it may often be impossible in a healthy democratic legislature, to obtain agreement on how the time should be apportioned. We cannot expect every member of the house to decide at the same moment that the time has come to stop talking and to start voting. Nor is this problem peculiar to the Canadian House of Commons. Every democratic assembly requires some procedure for turning discussion into decision. In the parliaments of Australia, New Zealand and India, for example, there are procedures for bringing on decisions on bills. As long ago as 1932 Lord Campion wrote:

Most modern legislatures have found it necessary to adopt rules for limiting debate, whether by providing for the termination of debate at the will of the majority, or by laying down the time limit in advance, or by limiting the duration of speeches, or by some similar device. The closure is perhaps the commonest of these devices, and it is a serviceable instrument. But it does not generally stand alone. Most parliamentary bodies, certainly the British house of commons, find that for certain kinds of business other methods of restricting debate are necessary.

There are the sins of omission. These are commission; there is business that is slighted or prevented when discussions by the house are delayed. Consider the present situation. Bills often get priority, not because of their