

*Auditor General*

Let me quote again words written by the Prime Minister appearing in *Cité Libre* with reference to his predecessor. He wrote:

Mr. Pearson must betray the program of his party as well as the principles. He had nothing to lose but his honour. He lost it. His whole party lost it too.

I would suggest that if any honour has been lost by those in the Liberal party, it is being lost by those who sit opposite and go along with the policies of the government which will inevitably destroy this country economically and which are downgrading rapidly the power of parliament.

The Prime Minister also wrote these words: "Pearson, Pickersgill, Lacoste, Gordon—all lousy idiots". I suggest that if there are any idiots at all in the House of Commons today, then they are those who are prepared to sit idly by as the government proceeds along its present disastrous path.

In the three years I have been a member, one of the things that has bothered me the most is the inability of the House to examine properly the estimates of various government departments. I recall, on occasions prior to coming here as a member, sitting in the gallery as a spectator and watching members examining the estimates of various departments. I recall that it seemed at that time that members had some say, some control, over what was going on. But along came this government in 1968 and changes were made that resulted in the operations of parliament being drastically curtailed to a point where members of the House do not have any effective control over the estimates of the government.

I think that the taxpayers of the country would be absolutely appalled if they could witness the shocking spectacle of hurried and inadequate examination of the estimates by the committees of the House in order that the estimates can be pushed through the House by a certain set date, regardless of whether or not members are satisfied with what they contain or with whether they have obtained answers to legitimate questions.

I firmly believe it would be better, and would serve the democratic process better if parliament were to revert to the system of the past where there were no fixed deadlines in existence for the passage of estimates through the House.

Something that should be of the greatest concern to members of the House has been the revelation that certain funds are often buried or hidden in the estimates so that they can not be properly discovered. We have seen examples uncovered recently of hidden votes for so called "security measures", and one wonders how parliament can properly examine expenditures of this country when things are hidden from its view.

I was surprised to learn, when raising certain questions before the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee on the expenses of the Prime Minister's office, that expenses for the use made of government aircraft by the Prime Minister are not included in any way in the expenses and operations of his office.

[Mr. Cossitt.]

● (2140)

Since 1968 we have witnessed the Prime Minister travelling to all parts of the world, and when it is on government business I am sure Canadians have no argument with this whatsoever. Nevertheless, the expenses for such things should properly be charged to the operation of the Prime Minister's office, and perhaps the reason that this is not done is because it would also necessitate charging to the same budget the expenses involved in the Prime Minister's use of government aircraft for extensive pleasure and political trips. Surely it is time that the Canadian people knew of the thousands and thousands of dollars which have been spent in this regard by our Prime Minister and which have been buried in the costs of the Department of National Defence, or in the costs of the Department of Transport.

It is strange that if a minister of the Crown other than the Prime Minister uses a government aircraft, the cost of such operation is charged back to that minister's department and reflects in his expenditures, but that this procedure is not followed in regard to the Prime Minister himself. One can only conclude that placing the staggering travelling costs for pleasure and politics on the part of the Prime Minister under the costs of his office would be something more than parliament and the people of Canada would be prepared to swallow.

No one should really be surprised by the government hiding things because secrecy has been one of its main principles. It has been used to withhold from parliament what seems to me in many cases to be legitimate information. Many hon. members at one time or another have been refused answers to questions on the ground that the information fell into such categories "not in the national interest" or "not the established policy of the minister to reveal". Such phrases have been used in most cases for the sole purpose of preventing parliamentary examination of facts.

I suggest that the only reason for any information of any kind ever being withheld from this House should be that the answer, "made public, would be harmful to the national security" otherwise all information should be readily available to parliament. At the same time, of course, one can understand the hesitancy of the government in adopting such a policy because it would obviously make even clearer the encroachments made by the executive branch on the powers of parliament.

One would expect that the Auditor General would be able to dig out all the things which are wrong in the gigantic operation of government, to recommend that something be done about such things, and to expect that something would be done. This has obviously not been the case, and the fact is clearly illustrated by these words written by the former Auditor General, Maxwell Henderson:

Looking back across the years, I can see that the office of the Auditor General of Canada has been increasingly beleaguered. The attempts to hamper his staff and hamstring his investigations have come ever more dangerously close to fruition and today, for all my work, the office is in graver danger than ever before. I can see that unless this post is strengthened—strengthened substantially and soon—two results are bound to follow: first, the staggering toll of waste, fraud, duplicity and ordinary stupidity that costs the Canadian taxpayer millions of dollars every year will continue to climb. Secondly, the ultimate control that