

rarely do hon. members know what is going to take place throughout the day, much less during the private members' hour. On Mondays we discuss notices of motions, but on a given Monday which notice of motion? We pretty well have to wait until we come to the end of the wire before we know which notice of motion will come before us.

We have before us a perfectly good motion which is of interest to many people, yet the people of Canada do not have the opportunity to tune in or come to this chamber to hear the debate.

I do not know whether in my dying days as a parliamentarian I can make my voice heard. It certainly has not been listened to very much with respect to the procedures of this House, in regard to which we are still in the last century. We still have not brought our business up to date, in spite of the fact that even the Mother of Parliaments has gone well ahead of us. We remain more British than the British.

I should like to come now to the essence of the motion before us and to commend the hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mrs. Pigott) for having brought it forward. It contains a number of things about which the majority of the people on the special committee over the past few years would have echoed the same sentiments. I am afraid I cannot agree with my hon. friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Harquail), who has taken the position that there is enough accountability for the National Capital Commission. I am afraid I cannot agree with that. I do not like to disagree with my hon. friend, but the fact is that he, being a parliamentary secretary and in those exalted realms, must now not criticize too much or even seem to criticize the government.

I do not think it is a question of criticizing the government when I say that there is not sufficient accountability on the part of the NCC. The government agreed to set up a special committee to look into these matters. Hon. members will recall that in the first session of this parliament such a committee was set up. Throughout that first session the committee did a great deal of work and, as the House knows, I have the honour to be the co-chairman of that committee.

The committee went through what I refer to as kitchen work. We did the kind of work which had to be done but which perhaps was not very interesting to some hon. members because of the fact that it was tedious, laborious and repetitious. However, it was the kind of work which had to be done before we could go on to consider anything else. We had to listen to briefs. We had to read over many briefs and hear the points of view of as many groups and individuals as possible in order to apprise ourselves of what will be the need over the next 25 years or longer in the national capital area.

We have gone over this, and it is old history now but, unfortunately, during the second session the committee was not called together again. As a result a great deal of time was lost. Finally, during this present session we were called together again. The committee has tried to pick up where it left off and to review what had been studied in the first session. As a result, as has been mentioned by some of our colleagues here

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today, the committee is at work and is getting ready to prepare a report. In my view we could have used a lot more time in that committee. For this reason I rather like the idea of having a permanent committee to consider matters regarding the National Capital Commission, as suggested by the hon. member whose motion is before us.

I think it is essential to have a continuous process whereby the National Capital Commission reports to this House. This, of course, pre-supposes that the national capital remains in its present form or in a form similar to its present form. In our committee part of our work is to look at the whole governmental structure. We would like to consider, for example, whether the national capital area should be truly a national capital district independent of other governments. We would like to study whether it should be a state or a province and whether it should be represented by local politicians.

● (1742)

These are questions which were before us and these are the questions we wanted to consider. If we are talking about the National Capital Commission in its present form, there is no doubt in my mind that it should report to parliament on a regular basis. In the past, whenever NCC representatives came before us only a perfunctory examination was made of the commission's affairs. There has been very little accountability to the elected representatives.

The hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton mentions in her motion that the powers exercised by the NCC have been arbitrary. I would not say that the NCC acts in an arbitrary way and simply leave it at that, but I will say that the NCC has acted in arbitrary ways in the past. I am not saying it continues to do so. Indeed, as a result of the establishment of our committee and of the fact that awareness of what the NCC is all about has become so much greater, there has been an increased degree of co-operation and less arbitrary action on the part of some public servants. However, there have been many instances in the past of arbitrary action by the commission. Such cases were brought home to us by various witnesses who appeared before the committee.

When the special committee continues its work over the several months in which this parliament continues to exist, those who have not had the opportunity to visit another capital will be able to do so. As has been mentioned, the committee was to have visited Washington but the trip had to be cancelled because of work here in the House. I would hope that in the near future members who have not done so will avail themselves of the opportunity which will be given them to visit Washington and examine the structure there.

Although Washington is a national capital in the true sense, independent of other governments, there are some similarities to our situation here. The federal district is set up independent of other governments, but in practice it is not really independent. One of the things I admire greatly is the consultative process they have adopted. They have set up what is called a council of governments—they refer to it as COG. It is a voluntary organization inasmuch as people serve on it without