

Motions for Papers

sions of the cabinet, as the hon. member for York West suggested. It is not a question of wishing to see the information before the cabinet and the ministry have provided their recommendations to this House. On the contrary, I am talking about information to justify and give reasons for those recommendations.

During the same debate last May, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Breau), made some remarks on this matter which I feel should be repudiated. He said that the government does not need copies of the minutes of the NDP caucus meetings in order to make up its mind concerning policy. The analogy hardly stands up. I am not calling for the production of the minutes of the meetings of the Privy Council or of the cabinet, and therefore it is not analogous to suggest that the hon. member is doing me a favour by not asking for the minutes of the NDP caucus meetings.

What we are talking about is not an analogy between two parties but, rather, about the basis on which the government of the country forms certain conclusions and the basis on which parliament judges those conclusions. I think it does no service to the principles which we are debating here to exaggerate the request being made.

● (1710)

The hon. member for Gloucester went on to say that he did not understand why the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore should have trouble arriving at a political judgment as to which program should be voted for. But that is not the point. On the contrary, I am trying to get some information upon which I can form a judgment which is not purely dictated by political motives.

If you deny members of parliament information in respect of the dogma or ideology behind a program, you will have political judgments and nothing else. Surely members of parliament—I readily admit to being a very junior one—find ample time during the course of committee proceedings to put aside narrow political judgments and try to make some objective evaluation of the worth of a program. I have no difficulty in arriving at a political judgment, but I have some difficulty in arriving at an objective judgment in the absence of any substantial information upon which to make it.

The hon. member referred to evaluation reports which members of my party had asked for in the course of committee hearings during the winter. These evaluation reports, among other things, dealt with a program involving about \$150 million undertaken by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. We were told in the committee by the hon. member that these evaluations were being carried on, but we have never seen the evaluation reports. In the first place, I would ask why we have not seen them when the expenditure of so many million dollars rests on them and, secondly, I suggest that when we never see them we can perhaps be forgiven when some of us wonder if in fact they exist. The hon. member for Gloucester said that the NDP seems to be looking for independent evaluations. By all means let us have independent evaluations, but such an evaluation is not precisely the same thing as the program forecast asked for today.

[Mr. Grier.]

These reports are a part of the total, and it is an important principle to provide members of parliament with information on the basis of which they can make objective and sound judgments. We do our homework in the opposition, as I am sure the supporters of the government do, but the resources at our disposal, I think it goes without saying, have very real limitations. Faced with committees day after day and the need to judge the worth of programs day after day, it seems self-evident that in the government's own interest, if for no altruistic reason, it would make sense to provide us with more information.

The opportunities for scrutiny now open to members of parliament could be better used than they are. Again speaking as a very junior member of the House, I was not a member when the estimates were considered in committee of the whole, but I have been impressed by the opportunities for scrutiny which are available in committee although not on all occasions have I been impressed by the extent to which those opportunities have been utilized. I would concede to the hon. member for Gloucester that on many occasions these opportunities are largely utilized for purely partisan political purposes, but I believe that if more information were available there would be less of that and more objective evaluation of the cost of many government programs put before us.

I am willing to be quite realistic in attempting to meet the legitimate inhibitions and reservations expressed by members of the government to providing documentation of their eventual decisions. If it makes it easier not to insist on getting program forecasts, surely that is something that can be worked out. But the principle of the thing and the point of the whole debate is to urge upon the government the value and the wisdom of providing members of parliament with something other than the figures contained in the blue book and such other research information, very often of a partial nature, which they may be able to produce.

In conclusion, I know some government members have not yet had the privilege of finding themselves in the opposition and perhaps do not fully appreciate some of the difficulties involved. They may find it difficult to believe that an opposition member might occasionally be prepared to drop his partisan cloak and get down to brass tacks, in dollars and cents, about the internal financing of government programs. But believe it or not, I say through you, Mr. Speaker, to members opposite that is very frequently the mood in which an opposition member goes to committee meetings.

Time and again we find ourselves bereft of all but the scantiest information provided by a ministry. Whatever else we can pick up and use to substantiate conclusions, in the absence of the kind of information I am seeking, is very often dictated by political reasons alone.

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Dupras (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I have tried to listen as carefully as possible to the remarks made by the mover the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Herbert) to find out why last May he failed to convince my colleagues from York West (Mr. Fleming), Vaudreuil (Mr. Émard) and Gloucester (Mr. Breau), of the merits of disclosing government long term plans. I was hoping that today he would take the time to give us all the