

tion to the position which it holds under our standing orders, to go the second mile in deceiving parliament, withholding information from parliament and withholding the opportunity to debate by using \$1 items. That has not helped, and if that is not substantive, then in terms of this institution I wonder what is.

If there is a danger of parliament not surviving, it is because of what has happened over the course of the last short while. If parliament has become a difficult place for hon. members—and it has certainly changed; it is certainly not what it was before for the private member who represents at least 125,000 constituents or so—then I cannot help but say that the reason for that is we have lost the right to question, we have lost the right to examine, and we have lost what was fundamental, to a large extent, in our parliament prior to the rule changes in 1968. In other words, because of the propensity of governments wanting to legislate, parliament has become a legislative grist-mill.

I would be the last to say that governments ought not to be strong in a parliamentary system, but I hope the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) will join me in being among the first to say that to counterbalance the weight of the executive on the parliamentary system as we are now established, there should be returned to parliament the right to make the examinations of which I have spoken. If I believed that \$1 items could help, then I really ought not to be here because, in fact, \$1 items further erode the process.

We have been given three secretaries each, we have research assistants, we have research offices and a host of things. Most of us are well attuned to the parliamentary system. All of us have attributes, but the question we must ask ourselves since 1968 or 1969 is, have we been better able, under our rules, to discharge our responsibilities and to counterbalance the executive? We do not want to overthrow the executive or undermine it; we do not want to stonewall the executive: but we want to deal with it in a responsible, parliamentary way. For all the facilities we have, we are not able to do so. For all the relative richness of our offices, the rights which are important to all of us who do not sit on the treasury benches but happen to sit on both sides of the House are diminished.

I think I understand the duty of a government in a parliamentary system. No rule change can be made to work if it is not recognized that the government should have sufficient authority to proceed with its program. I have never suggested otherwise. I believe the initial mistake in our parliament was made when all parties assumed that the legislative program was so important that all other business, especially the consideration of supply, should be relegated to committees.

When that happened, this parliament changed. The balance went in favour of the executive rather than in favour of parliament. The principal concern of my party—and this motion is part of it—is the fact that the House has lost control over supply. We have to give more significance to that problem in any rule changes we may deal with, and I think we also have to give more significance to the participation of private members in the House and in committee proceedings. I think it has

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become evident to all of us as we go along just how important is a freedom of information bill which would allow, by its terms, the knowledge which permits effective debate in this House. We should not pit, in parliamentary terms, a large bureaucracy against a small one.

We should have complete examination of the problems which affect us from day to day in terms of the knowledge which members of parliament should have available to them. We should not deal with these matters through instinctive reactions. Our reactions should be as a result of some knowledge. As the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp) knows, I proposed to the committee that aside from the examination of supply perhaps it would be a good thing for us to consider bringing back certain departments—I have suggested six on some occasions, and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has expressed a view like this—into the House to test the necessity of examining and our ability to examine, in an unlimited way, certain government departments.

We ought to establish—and this was my proposal to the standing committee of which the hon. member for Eglinton is the chairman—an over-all expenditure committee which can deal with the programs, the policies and the expenditures of the government in an on-going way so that in the course of a four-year parliament each of the major departments of the government could be examined in depth. Under our present system that cannot happen unless the government wills it so. I think parliament should be able to will it so.

I think the attitudes expressed by the hon. member for Eglinton were surprising. I was surprised, especially, when he said we have never taken an opportunity to debate important things. As the hon. member knows, we have asked to have set aside an occasion to debate matters involving external affairs. We have asked for time to debate economic matters. There have been discussions about white papers, and on a pre-budget basis we have wanted to discuss economic questions. The answer we always receive is that we should use an opposition day. My respectful submission to the hon. member for Eglinton is that it is not just the responsibility of the opposition to deal with these matters: the choices of days available to the opposition are limited indeed.

● (1630)

There is an important principle at stake. That is the principle that parliament is the place to discuss and to debate important issues. The use of opposition days by opposition parties indicates that to the extent we can we have used them to discuss what we regard as important matters. The fact that the government has not set aside time is an indication that they look upon this place as a legislative mill rather than a forum for discussion. Parliament is certainly not the richer for that approach.

One of the things that the government complains of is long speeches on second reading. What they call unnecessary debate is, to us, a matter deserving discussion. The former government House leader must understand that time limits do