

*Control of Government Expenditures*

of Mr. Dennis and his task force report? Is there trouble in the printing department getting it ready for publication, or is it that such sweeping demands are being made for change that it could never be published for fear of putting CMHC totally out of business as a lending agency?

When it comes to waste and mismanagement the government's record is classic. The Prime Minister says to his supporters, "Let us not go to the public on our record." I don't blame him. Members opposite with any sense of responsibility dare not go to the people on their record. They want to talk about their future plans, but I want to talk about their record. It is a horrible record, a disastrous record, and lacks any indication of a sense of responsibility.

Hon. members opposite sit in fear because they know we have the right to stand up and criticize, and with our mandate have the right to be the protectors of the people's interests. I can tell the smiling Minister of State for Urban Affairs that this is our function, and we will continue to carry it out with all the strength in our bodies. When we show the people that we know what is going on, we increase our credibility, and as a result of our constructive criticism the people will learn that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will be a reasonable alternative to the government after the next election.

**Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming):** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to chastise the government as the preceding speaker did. I wish to talk about what I consider to be a problem which affects the role that members of parliament play as representatives of the people with respect to the operations of government.

The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) talked a lot about the idea of providing members of the opposition with more information. Mr. Speaker, I have more information here than I can ever handle. The President of the Treasury Board says that we are provided with additional information in these estimates. Mr. Speaker, if the directors of Bell Telephone or General Motors in the United States put out a financial statement similar to this, they would not last until the next board of directors meeting.

This financial statement respecting the country is not read by the general public. It is no longer even an inter-departmental document. One can no longer pick it up and find out what Joe Blow in another department is being paid. All one can find out is the general expenditures of a department, with the specifics referred to in very general terms. There is even a page for each department in the estimates with nothing but pure propaganda. These statements sound like those the CBC makes when it runs those promotionals on "I Love Me." That is what each department has.

All countries are having difficulty supervising, in a democratic way, the expenditures of various government departments. If there is one thing for which the present government can be criticized, it is that it has given up the idea of democracy. It intends to rule, and be damned to everybody else. On more than one occasion the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has told the Liberal caucus, "I am the only one who can win the next election. Therefore, if

[Mr. Alexander.]

you don't like what I do, leave." The Prime Minister is telling opposition members of parliament, "If you don't like it here, leave." And he is telling us, through his supporters in the various committees, "If you don't like the way a committee is being run, get out." The only thing the government seeks from its backbenchers is their vote. By having a majority on all committees it does not need to give out information. All it needs is sufficient members to vote and pass something, and then get on to something else.

England has this problem. But in England they believe in paying attention to the expressions of the loyal opposition. Democracy will not function if questions are not asked about the expenditures of government. That is their system in England. We may have become confused in Canada by having more than two political parties in our system. This may be part of the reason a government with a majority says, "We will use our majority and, if the country doesn't like it, the country can change that majority." Frankly, I found the same attitude displayed by the previous Conservative government. But it is magnified in the present government.

I can remember only one occasion when the Prime Minister showed enough interest in the debates that take place in this House to remain in it. That was one late evening, after midnight, when he did not have any place else to go, so he dropped in here for a few hours. Government members in one of the committees this morning talked about what wonderful thing this was, particularly when opposition members, who had other plans for the Christmas holidays, may have been away in other parts of the world.

We have changed many of the procedures in this House, but those changes have not made it easier for the opposition to scrutinize estimates. I believe we will have to set up an independent agency to scrutinize estimates, and examine them in the same way as the Auditor General examines expenditures. If we are going to examine en masse all governmental estimates, we will have to make an effort to discover what policies are wrong, simply because we do not have the time or ability to do much about the actual expenditures themselves.

It is an exercise in futility for some of us to spend two or three hours, two or three times a week, for two or three months in a committee listening to some of the experts explaining items in the estimates, when we know that the government members have a majority on the committee. Unless the Fourth Estimate picks up a particular incident, the public will learn nothing about it. If the government were really serious in saying parliament should scrutinize estimates it would give us the opportunity to do so, and allow us to correct anything wrong that civil servants may have done with respect to estimates.

Members on an estimates committee should be interested in determining that there are no abuses in the expenditures covered by the various estimates. But that is not the way we do things now. We have the adversary system, with one side made up of a majority of government members. In my opinion, there have been damned few occasions when members of the opposition were able to change in any meaningful way any estimate of any department. The question of whether we should handle