

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I had limited time left and very few remarks left to make, but I would like to close by saying, in respect of items mentioned by the mover of the motion and threatened for further advancement by members of his party, that I expect that supporters of the government on this side of the House will respond in detail to these allegations.

However, I should like to say a word in respect of the suggestion made by the Auditor General for a periodic management review of the government service every ten years or so, and also advocated by the mover of the motion. As I indicated in my remarks, since 1968 there have been substantial changes both in the management structure and in management responsibilities within the public service. We have been endeavouring, and indeed are still in the process, of reforming the old and introducing new management techniques designed to make the various operations of the government both more efficient and more effective.

This, in terms of a very large organization, being relatively new, I think that perhaps the time is a little premature to call in a large formal organization to review what is only the beginning of a reformed process. Perhaps at some later date when we have had more experience with these new measures such a review could be undertaken. I have said that before reaching a final conclusion on this I would like to secure the advice of the new Auditor General when he formally assumes his duties and has a chance to look at the government apparatus. He has had considerable experience in his professional career with both the management operations and with making observations and recommendations on them. I would regard his unofficial advice as being of considerable value before reaching a final conclusion.

● (1410)

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I would say that the mover of the motion has failed utterly to demonstrate either his understanding of the way control of expenditures is achieved or, if not a lack of understanding, then perhaps a wilful blindness to the facts of the situation. As a consequence, I do not think that we, on this side of the House at any rate, can either in spirit or in fact support the motion.

In respect of his other suggestion, a reform of the practices of the House to provide a different framework within which the public accounts can be examined, I am not at all convinced by his notion of a television spectacular in the House as being an effective way of learning what is going on.

He has suggested that every opposition motion should be the subject of a vote but when given this option, as he was today, he declined for what I suppose to be partisan or other reasons. I find that rather convincing; while he does not want to see it happen, he is nevertheless inclined to force on everybody else the necessity of voting on every motion. When given the chance to put into operation this useful device of his choice, he chooses not to do so.

Control of Public Funds

Mr. Baldwin: We will remind you of that at the time you bring up one and are defeated on it.

Mr. Drury: As for the suggestion with regard to the Public Accounts Committee itself, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to comment on this. We have a Standing Committee charged with the responsibility for organizing the procedures of the House, and perhaps he should make his suggestion to that committee rather than me with respect to how the Public Accounts Committee might be improved.

I would repeat, Sir, not only to the mover of the motion but to all members of his party that if they have ideas on how the form of presentation of the estimates could be improved to make them more effective and useful, I personally would welcome them and would give them—it would be cynical to say the consideration which they deserve but I would go further than that and say every consideration.

Mr. Nielsen: In due course.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Barry Mather (Surrey-White Rock): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the official opposition's motion which is before us today protesting the government's takeover of parliament's control over the spending of public money and which criticizes their mismanagement is very closely related to, and perhaps has its reason for existence in, the report of the Auditor General recently tabled in this House.

If that is so, I would think that a great deal of what either the government or the opposition contends about this motion would have to do with the credibility of the Auditor General. I do not think there is any doubt, Mr. Speaker, that auditors general everywhere are more likely to be popular with the opposition than with the administration. The nature of their work is to find the waste of public moneys by the government and its agencies and to try to correct that. This is a very useful and helpful function. I mention this at the start because much of what I have to say will also be related to the report of the Auditor General.

As a member of the Public Accounts Committee of the House, and thus with knowledge of his work, I have found him to be a conscientious public servant.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mather: His work and proposals have saved a good deal of the taxpayers' money or put it to better use. In his report the Auditor General leaves no doubt that there have been, on the one hand, deterioration of parliamentary control over the use of public funds and, on the other, an immense increase in the level of the amounts of funds so expended. He states that in the last ten years the federal spending of public money has tripled. We are now in the spending area of \$20 billion every 12 months and he says:

... it is the right, privilege and duty of the House of Commons to control the finances of the country. It is the responsibility of the government to assist the House by submitting the proposed spending to the members in as simple and straightforward a manner as it can devise.