

discussion in committee of supply, in standing committee, or on the floor of the House, does not change it at all. I should not say that in absolute terms—I have seen one or two dollars changed in a few decades—but in reality nothing is changed.

All the discussion we have afterwards in the Committee on Public Accounts, or among the public on the basis of the Auditor General's report, does not change a thing except for drawing attention to some sins, the result of which is that some of those sins are not committed again for a little while.

What we really need is parliamentary participation in the decision as to how money is to be appropriated, where it should be spent, for what purposes it is to be appropriated, and so on.

As I say, Madam Speaker, I fully realize the conflict between this approach and the idea of responsible government, namely, that the government makes the decisions and all we can do is to say yes or no. But perhaps that idea needs to be considered carefully in light of the complexity of democratic government in a country like Canada today when we are spending \$30 billion odd, when we have hundreds of thousands of persons who are working for the government, when we are involved in the lives of our people from the cradle to the grave, perhaps not as much as I would like it to be but certainly a lot more than was the case a few years ago.

● (2020)

Perhaps the sacred notion that only the government can produce that Blue Book and put it before us has to be revamped. Perhaps the sacred right of members of parliament, as the representatives of the people, to have some say about how the purse is distributed should prevail, and we should establish some kind of committee which could have some say in how the money is to be appropriated before it gets into that Blue Book.

I am a party to the experiment we are conducting in this very session. As I have already said, I think that some of the days we have spent on estimates have been worth while. I am prepared to go further and say that I think under our present system perhaps one or two departments per year should come before us without time limit, so that we can really hold the ministers at bay until we get satisfaction about their estimates. But even if we achieve that, we would still be dealing with proposals for expenditures after the fact. In that situation it is inevitable that most of the comments from the opposition side will be comments of criticism and complaint.

The President of the Treasury Board is quite right that members of the opposition complain about too much money being spent on one thing, and then they come along and want more money spent on something else. I will accept that criticism myself. There are things we spend money on around here which do not deserve it, and I think the poor, people on low incomes, those who need better health care and those who need better pensions deserve more money put their way. It is not satisfactory and it is really frustrating that all we are able to do is address ourselves to these things after the horse has been stolen from the public treasury, if I can produce an awfully mixed metaphor.

Auditor General

As I said when I began, I do not expect an idea like this to be approved tonight, tomorrow morning, or perhaps even in this session's Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, but I throw it out, and I throw it out as strongly as I can. I do so as a traditionalist in terms of parliamentary procedure who still likes it the way we did it when I first came here. Granted, we were spending so little money then that we had plenty of time to do it in the old way.

What we need is a new approach to the spending of money. Even if we do not make the same change with respect to legislation, even if the government has the say as to what bills it brings before parliament, surely in terms of the proposals for the spending of money there should be some input into the making of those decisions by members of parliament as a whole before the fact, rather than afterwards. I think if we had something like that, it might be tougher on us in the opposition—we might have to take more responsibility for the decisions—but I believe it would be a better and more responsible way of discharging our task as the guardians of the public purse.

[Translation]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to deal with the motion of the opposition:

That it is the opinion of this House that it is necessary to declare that the power of the Executive has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished; and, in particular, that means must be found by this House to inquire into, prevent, and correct abuses in the expenditure of public money by the government of Canada, including the immediate passage of laws to strengthen and improve the office of the Auditor General.

Madam Speaker, I think the excessive powers of the present government is the cause of the financial dictatorship exercised by that government. Who is responsible for that dictatorship of the federal government over Canada as a whole which is extended to the provinces?

The federal government was certainly wily with the provinces when it took from them the taxation rights it has exercised for years.

Today, the government is blamed for its tremendous spending powers. I quite agree, but that situation did not originate with the present government. For over 30 years, succeeding federal governments have taken advantage of their sound economic situation to increase their expenses at the same rate as their tax revenues.

Municipalities and school boards complain that the provinces are infringing upon their fields. The provinces voice the same complaints with respect to the federal government which interferes increasingly every year into exclusively provincial fields. While everyone protests loudly against federal infringements, the government apologizes and even strengthens its hold, claiming that it is only trying to save the provinces. Indeed, the federal government, the great protector of the provinces!

It is to improve social justice, as the president of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) said this afternoon, and the same minister added that although the government doubled its expenditures, it is not any worse than the provinces which have doubled their expenditures also. But he forgot to indicate that the provinces are still directly responsible for matters of health, highways, agriculture