

place—we have a vested interest in the operations of committees in the other place because we are both part of the Parliament of Canada—that we made it quite plain that from that time on, all motions dealing with committees would have to be placed on the order paper; that unanimous consent would not be given; and that it would be essential that there be at least an opportunity for discussion. Pursuant to that policy, the government placed on the order paper the terms of reference for the appointment of a number of committees, including this one.

• (2:10 p.m.)

A short time ago the hon. member for Malpègue (Mr. MacLean) placed on record his consent on behalf of this party to the establishment of some of these committees, but consent was deliberately withheld with respect to this committee so that it would provide a vehicle for discussion and an opportunity to renew the interesting debate we had earlier on this subject.

I might say in passing that there are a number of areas of concern to us. One is the question of cost. We are concerned about the cost because the people of Canada are much concerned about the level of taxation. They want to know what Parliament is doing, what its operations are costing and whether all of them are necessary. It is with this in mind that I called into question the extent to which the joint committee on the constitution was proposing to become involved in a travelling program of a substantial nature in accordance with the power sought, and granted, of journeying from place to place.

I should note in passing that the report filed by the co-chairman of the committee this morning makes provision for travelling all over Canada during a period of 45 days from the time the session began until the end of June. The cost involved here might well be substantial. However, I shall go no further on these lines, because I would not be allowed to do so. I draw attention to this matter, however, because we entered a caveat at the time we first held our discussion on this subject. We made our views known at that time, but no notice has been taken of them. Since then, some interesting information has come to us from the other place, information which emphasizes the desirability of providing means whereby this House would have some degree of control after committees have been appointed on motions of this kind. These things should not be left to the committees themselves or to the good offices of Mr. Speaker, who is sometimes left in a difficult position.

The evidence indicates that well over one million dollars has been disbursed so far with respect to two committees of the other place, and more will yet be spent. As was demonstrated by the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales), who spoke in the last debate on this subject, the possible costs of the committee to which I have been referring will be an amount of similar magnitude. For this reason, whenever there is a motion before us to set up a committee, we intend to bring our concern about these matters to the attention of the House. When a

million dollars is being spent, I want to know, and my hon. friends want to know, that good value will be obtained for it in the circumstances which prevail today.

Another area of our concern is the extent to which the multiplicity of our committees is reducing the operations of this House to a nullity. I know there are problems. I know we are learning as we go along. The other day I was reading a report brought in by the new leader of the house in the United Kingdom, Mr. Whitelaw. Some members of this House, including the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) had an opportunity on one or two occasions both here and elsewhere to meet members of the United Kingdom Parliament and discuss our experience with them. Members of the British Parliament were very interested in our committee system, but they warned us: do not go too far or too fast or you will remove all the emphasis from the House and place it on the committees, and the chamber of the House of Commons will cease to be what it has been for so long, the central pivot of our democratic system.

I notice that at Westminster they have gone moderately along the path we have taken by setting up specialized committees to deal with some of their work. I intend, later in my remarks, to commend in the highest terms the Public Accounts Committee. It has carried out its function in an admirable and non-partisan way, and what I have said so far does not apply to that body. But I am using this motion as a peg upon which to hang words of warning to the House, and to the government, with respect to possible abuse of the committee system. When I see only a score or so of members in this chamber, as happens every day of the week, I know there are large numbers of our members who are engaged in committee work or engaged on their constituency duties. But I believe it is incumbent upon us to pattern the committee structure on the basis that this House is the central point around which all the activities of Parliament should revolve.

We ought to examine every proposal to set up a committee in the light of this responsibility, and I can assure hon. members that I intend to do this from time to time in the hope that the government will take up the suggestion I made at the time of the last debate on this subject, a suggestion which was echoed by other opposition members. The time has come, in the light of our experience during the past one and a half years, for the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization to review the operations of House committees so as to ensure that the difficulties and the faults which have been so obvious, and to which attention has been drawn time and time again by my hon. friends on this side of the House, are removed and that necessary reforms are introduced. If this is not done, the committee structure will collapse and bring down with it much of the value of debate in this House.

The Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. Jerome) was a valuable member of the special committee which was the forerunner of the present standing committee, so I am sure he would be the first to acknowledge that the system