

Control of Public Funds

manner in which this institution should operate, but everything is "bassackwards" with this same old bunch over there.

● (1510)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I should like to remind the hon. member that his time expired three minutes ago. I exercised some generosity in order to give him an extra few minutes because of the points of order which had been raised. The hon. member has already been given an extra three minutes; therefore I regret to inform him that his time has expired.

Mr. Nielsen: You have been most generous, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to spend too much of my time dealing with the comments of the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). It is a long time since the hon. member attacked me for something he knew nothing about. The last occasion was before I was elected a Member of Parliament. While I was a candidate he made some rather erroneous charges.

However, I should like to point out in all fairness and honesty that to my knowledge I have never sat on a committee of this House of Commons of which he has been a member. So I find it difficult to understand how he can be so authoritarian about anything that happened in a committee on which I sat but he did not. His contention is that hon. members on this side are really trying to frustrate the operation of committees for members on the other side. I should like to use a specific example which can be well substantiated by the records of the House. If one looks at the record of the 3.30 p.m., Thursday meeting of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, he will find that the estimates of the Department of National Health and Welfare were before the committee and that the members of the committee decided they would like the committee to vote on the estimates. One member of the Conservative party did not want to vote. I agreed that we should not vote because he wished to deal with the matter later.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Cafik: That certainly is an indication that the charge made is unfounded.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but he is a very experienced member and knows he cannot discuss committee evidence in the House when that committee has not filed its report. I think he would do us a great favour by dealing with the subject matter of the motion.

Mr. Cafik: Although I have mentioned the committee, I am merely responding to the allegations which have been made. To get down to the motion itself, it is really twofold. First, there is the allegation that the government is continuing to take over parliamentary control of public moneys. I should like to speak about that for a moment because I think it is a serious matter. In my view, Parliament is supreme and any government which would try to spend money without the approval of Parliament certainly

[Mr. Nielsen.]

would not be doing the right thing either by the letter or by the spirit of the law.

Let us look at what really has happened. First of all, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) mentioned the form of the estimates. I have no objection to that, but I would remind him and other hon. members that within the last five years the form of the estimates has been studied by the public accounts committee. The committee spent many months trying to make recommendations so that the facts in relation to the estimates would be more clear to Members of Parliament. If there is something still wrong in the form of the estimates and they are confusing to hon. members, then by all means let these members come forward with suggestions to clarify them and to make them more understandable. A great deal has already been done to this end by the parliamentary committee. Recommendations were proposed to and passed by the committee, and adopted by this government.

The second thing I should like to point out is that the time spent on the consideration of estimates seems to be a problem. Members now feel, since we have moved from the procedure of considering estimates in committee of the whole House to one where the matter is largely in the hands of the standing committees, that they are robbed of time to deal with the estimates. First of all, let us deal with the study of the estimates in committee. In my five years' experience as a Member of Parliament, when estimates are before a committee it is very seldom that a member really talks about the estimates which are before the committee. The questions range from policy matters to God knows what else. They do not really zero in on the amount of money allotted for a specific purpose and whether or not the expenditure is justified. Members on the other side who are concerned about this question ought to use their time more wisely and deal with the estimates which are before the committee rather than complaining now that they do not have adequate time to study them.

The last point concerns the House itself when dealing with the estimates. I understand that when the rules of this House were changed to bring about three periods a year with 25 opposition days, six of which could be used for votes, this was done in lieu of not having committee of the whole. Why do not members opposite use that time to zero in on and talk about the estimates of the government? Why do they not exercise their responsibility as Members of Parliament to scrutinize the estimates then, rather than try to make political points? They should fulfill their responsibility in that regard.

We might look at the estimates themselves to determine whether in fact they are worded and prepared in such a way that Parliament's will is frustrated. In my experience as a member of the committee on public accounts, the Auditor General on numerous occasions has brought to the attention of the committee that the will of Parliament has been frustrated. What he considered to be frustration of the will of Parliament was the actual determination of Parliament itself. For instance, I remember a couple of years ago that this allegation was made in respect of Vote L-55 concerning the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, where \$25 million was voted by Parliament for the current year and subsequent years. Parliament passed that vote. I