

sleeve was that it could say to the government, "These are the departments we want to deal with on the floor of the House of Commons in this particular session". I think that system worked fairly well. Perhaps modification of it would have been a good idea, but the main difficulty with that system, as I say, was that it was transitional only, and we did not renew it.

Then, we moved from that to the present system under which we send all of the estimates to committees, every last one, including the supplementaries, such as were tabled today. We have abolished the committee of supply. By the way, Mr. Speaker, I was a member of the procedural committee that recommended this, and we thought we were producing a method that was better than the former one. We decided that since all members were doing on supply days was making speeches anyway, we would put in their place 25 opposition days; that we would be honest about it and say 25 days are for opposition members to discuss whatever they wish. In return for that, we would let the estimates go to committees and renounce any right to deal with estimates on the floor of the House.

I think that was a mistake. I do not think we should be faulted for having proposed the idea and for having given it a trial. But it has not worked. The estimates go to committees. Perhaps in the first session of a new parliament the estimates of this department or of that one will get a fairly good going over. But so far as parliament as a whole is concerned, the members not on a particular committee get no chance at those estimates. A day comes, therefore, at the end of the session when a vote has to be taken, and unless those members put down motions, as some of us have done on occasion, all these millions or billions of dollars are voted in a very few minutes, without debate at all.

I think it might almost be better not to do it at all, and merely pass one act which provides that whatever estimates the Treasury Board has brought in are deemed to have been passed when the session ends. But I am sure the President of the Treasury Board does not want that authority. All I am saying is that what we do is so ridiculous that we might as well go the whole way. It is time we had a look at the experience we have had, a look at the four methods, assess them, and ask whether there is not some better way than the one we now follow.

I think the present system is no good. I think the second of the regimes I mentioned just a while ago was likewise no good, that is, when we sent all the estimates to committee of supply but with a time limit of 30 days. I think the system that was in effect when I first came here was the best, but it is not possible to go back to it because there are still only 365 days in the year and there is so much more business to be done. But I think something of the order of the third of the systems I described would be a lot better.

I would like to see us arrange for the estimates to go to committees, and I want to make some suggestions about that, but I would like us to make it part of our rules that the opposition has the right every session to name three or four departments—and it does not have to name them until on in the session—that would also be dealt with on the floor of the House of Commons. Whether that would

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be done by a committee of the whole or a committee of supply does not matter. I would even go so far as to say that this should be without time limit. Lengthen the days if necessary. Have morning sittings then, instead of morning sittings in the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. If there is anything to the supposition or myth that parliament controls the public purse, we ought to set it on a basis where we really will be doing this kind of thing.

With regard to the committees that handle estimates, they should be looked at as well. Some of my colleagues may develop some of the points in an amendment that I am going to move, namely, that there should be more services for those committees, more space for them. Don't kick us out of this building and put us over in the Confederation building somewhere. Leave us in this building, but provide a building in which committees can operate as they should. There should also be proper time for the committees to do their job. Now, I am back to an old theme that I often proclaim, namely, that there should be times when parliament does not meet but committees do so that they can do their job.

Then, we have to look in particular at the kind of job committees do on estimates. I go on committees that deal with veterans affairs and with health, welfare and pension matters. These are subjects in which I am interested. But when I do go on these committees, what is my interest? My interest is getting all the money I can for veterans, for pensions, for health services, or what have you.

When my farm colleagues go on the Agriculture Committee they are not interested in saving money. They are interested in getting money and services for the agriculture industry. That is part of our job. None of us is going to renounce it. But in my opinion there is a place for a committee on estimates made up of auditor types, public accounts types, members who will devote themselves to this and will scrutinize the estimates the way the Treasury Board is supposed to scrutinize them before they ever get into the book. I believe that whole programs should be looked at with what we sometimes call a fine-toothed comb, if that isn't a mixed metaphor of some sort. The job our committees do now on estimates is not an auditing job. It is not an inspection or scrutinizing job. It is a job that members do because they are interested in the subject of the committee to which the estimates have been referred.

Another fact of life around here is that in any parliament each department gets a pretty thorough going over about once, and then examination tends to peter out. It is repetition. Maybe it would be good enough in a four-year parliament that every department would have one thorough examination with, shall we say, a special committee on estimates, that could have the authority to call for three or four or five different departments that it would examine, not with an eye to getting more dollars for this or that program, but with an eye to close scrutiny of the estimates. This is the type of thing I am advocating. I think we should go back to a combination of reference of estimates to committees and of dealing with three or four departments on the floor of the House of Commons.

I also think, so far as the committees are concerned, that the standing committees generally should have more