

Alleged Loss of Control of Public Moneys

on this point I disagree with the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath)—to perform efficient work. This also enables them not only to question the ministers responsible for the various departments, but also their officials as well, and if they so desire, witnesses from the private sector, a practice which would be impossible if we still followed the former procedure of studying government expenditures in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Speaker, referring to a study made by the Committees Branch, I see that during the second session of the 28th Parliament, 152 meetings were spent on the study of the various departmental estimates.

For the 4th session of the 28th Parliament, to May 25, 1972, 124 meetings were devoted to the study of various departmental estimates.

Over and above the committees which study estimates, we also have to consider the mechanism for checking expenses, which is the public accounts committee. This committee again considered the matter of checking public accounts last fall, on November 9 and 16, 1971, as is evidence in Issues Nos. 51 and 52 of the committee proceedings. On that occasion, the committee had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Balls, assistant deputy minister of the Department of Supply and Services, who informed us that as far as tabling public accounts for the year 1970-71 was concerned, the government had made a commitment, back in 1968, through the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Richardson), to table the Public Accounts of Canada on October 31 at the latest. This year, the three volumes were tabled, the last of which on November 4, 1971.

The Public Accounts Committee set up a sub-committee made up of a member from each party and representatives for the Auditor General, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Supply and Services, to make a study in depth of the possibility of accelerating the tabling in the House of the public accounts of Canada.

Since 1968, as a result of the recommendation of the government, the Canadian Parliament has allotted funds to the opposition parties to retain the services of support personnel. The funds are allotted annually as follows: to the Progressive Conservative party, \$125,000; to the New Democratic party, \$35,000, and to the Social Credit Party of Canada, \$35,000.

The Standing Orders of the House afford the opposition parties other opportunities to study the various departmental estimates. I refer here to Standing Order 58(3), and I quote:

(3) Opposition motions on allotted days may be moved only by members in opposition to the government and may relate to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada and also may be used for the purpose of considering reports from standing committees relating to the consideration of estimates therein.

I will also quote subsection (5) of Standing Order 58:

(5) For the period ending not later than December 10, five sitting days shall be allotted to the business of supply. Seven additional days shall be allotted to the business of supply in the period ending not later than March 26. Thirteen additional days shall be allotted to the business of supply in the period ending not later than June 30.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, 25 days are allotted to the opposition.

[Mr. Clermont.]

I think the formula which consists in referring the study of government expenses to standing committees and, once those expenses have been made, to give them to the public accounts committee to consider, is a very satisfactory and very effective formula.

The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) said in his remarks on this motion that the government was unduly delaying consideration of the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report for the financial year ended March 31, 1970, was tabled in this House on June 4, 1971, and the House adjourned for the summer recess on June 30, 1971. The House reconvened on September 7, 1971, and on September 29 of that same year, it referred the Auditor General's report to the public accounts committee.

The committee started consideration of the report on October 14, 1971, held 17 meetings, and is now preparing its report.

Mr. Speaker, I will leave hon. members to decide whether the government unduly delayed consideration of the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Béchard: The opposition is not serious—as usual.

Mr. Clermont: The hon. member for Peace River as well as the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Rowland) who spoke before me referred to the 38 recommendations of the public accounts committee which, according to them, have been rejected or ignored.

• (1610)

[English]

A tabulation of these 38 recommendations indicates that the government has indeed responded to them, although not necessarily by acting in the fashion proposed. A substantial number of the issues have been subject to hearings before the Public Accounts Committee. I may say that in most cases these have satisfied the committee, because the subsequent reports of the committee have not raised the issues again.

I now refer to tabulations of issues and action taken. Many of these have been subject to lengthy debate. In this regard the committee has played an effective role and the procedure is not as ineffective as indicated. Mr. Speaker, the following is a summary of action taken on recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee: First, recommendations on which there has been specific comment by the minister involved, 14; second, recommendations on which there has been subsequent specific testimony by departments to the Public Accounts Committee without any new or changed recommendation by the committee, eight; third, recommendations on which departments have not been called upon to testify to the Public Accounts Committee but on which they have taken action which has not received publicity, three; fourth, recommendations which call for continued observation by the Auditor General of departmental practices rather than government action, one; fifth, recommendations subject to action re formulation of separate Auditor General Act, one; sixth, action could not be determined in time avail-