

complaint of all hon. members. From time to time their duties in this House of Commons do take them away from other functions which are also their duties in their constituencies and in other parts of the country. That is one of the difficulties of this life. I am happy to see the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) in the House today. Both he and I have a particularly acute problem in that regard sometimes, and sometimes greater difficulty explaining than perhaps does a member who comes from southwestern Ontario or from some other part of Canada. It is a difficulty hon. members face from time to time, particularly when the government brings forward important legislation.

I do not think there is any topic which ought to engage the attention of the House in any more direct way than a procedure which involves the control of the expenditure of money, because that is the whole reason, I suppose, that we are here. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has said on many occasions that he regards the prime function of members of parliament as that of watchdogs on parliamentary expenditures. After all, it is in the hands of the cabinet that the initiating authority lies, and parliament disposes of or deals with the initiatives that are dealt with and which are brought forward by the government. That is the essence of our system.

● (1552)

Therefore, when the government brings forward a bill which is as significant as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice has said it is, then I think that no member of parliament, whether he or she be a member of the government or a member of the opposition, ought to quarrel with the debate on that bill on the basis that he or she must be somewhere else. Basically members of parliament are elected to serve in this place. They are elected to serve on committees and they are elected to consider the expenditures of government regardless on which side of the House they sit. This is the essence of our procedures.

It is interesting that on third reading this debate has focussed a great deal of attention on a subject matter which the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) has directed his attention to over the years. I see he is in the House. He and I have discussed this matter in this Chamber and we have dealt with it in committees. We have accomplished through committees the two objectives that seem to be always running in conflict, namely, the necessity in the hands of the government to advance legislation at a reasonably rapid rate, on the one hand, and the necessity for members of parliament to be able to examine expenditures, programs, et cetera, of government on the other. This is in an effort to see whether we receive benefit for the money spent or allocated by parliament or whether the objectives of the program are sound or ought to be changed. I say to my friend from Scarborough East that I have admired the way he has pursued this objective. Notwithstanding the fact that he sits on the government side, I think he recognizes the necessities of this matter.

Financial Administration Act

The hon. member for Ottawa West was extremely generous to the hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) today and last night regarding his chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee. Indeed, the hon. member for Capilano has followed in the best traditions of the chairmanship of that committee. This chairmanship was given to a member of the opposition so that the public will know that we approach government spending and its appropriateness in a serious and non-partisan manner. For that same reason the vice-chairman of that committee is a member of the government side, namely the hon. member for Ottawa West. He too has conducted himself in the best traditions of that committee.

I mention also the Procedure and Organization Committee whose chairman is from the government side, at least up until his resignation yesterday. I am referring, of course, to the Hon. Mitchell Sharp, formerly the member for Eglinton, who always approached his work on that committee in a non-partisan way. The vice-chairman, who is equally interested in the functions of this House, is the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), a former Speaker of this House of Commons.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) serves on that committee. It is interesting to know when that committee met, it operated in a relatively non-partisan way. On the one hand it advanced the government's views in getting legislation through. Whereas the opposition's job is to preserve the rights of parliament and to examine what the government does. That is our job and one of the reasons why we are here.

That is why it is important that we consider this structure most carefully. The structure of the comptroller general is not a method by which the government is interfered with in any way or by which parliament's rights or duties are interfered with. This duty to examine is actually a method by which parliament will be helped. It is the hope that there will be less spillage and less wastage in the promotion of government programs with this kind of person in office.

I listened last night with great care to the hon. member for Ottawa West when he spoke on the amendment which stood in the name of the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre). He and I have a basic disagreement. This disagreement is not with respect to the function of the comptroller general but basically with respect to the question whether he ought to have a certain kind of legislative assistance by setting out in the law his terms of reference. The member for Ottawa West said it would be better if he were free of those kinds of legislative tools, free to operate in his own way as he saw the job developing. He said that the Auditor General who occupied a particular place ought to have his powers spelled out because his function is different.

I differ with him. I do not believe there is any reason why the comptroller general would be in conflict or at odds with the Auditor General if the Auditor General is given certain terms of reference by statute. But that is a difference of opinion about operation. There is basically no difference of opinion