

Parliament

national interest are properly served. We have not done that job in parliament in recent years, and unless there are fundamental changes made in the rules of parliament, in the way in which we conduct our activities, I do not think that Canadian taxpayers are being properly served. I hope that members in the House tonight will support the motion that has been moved by my colleague the hon. member for Yukon. I believe it deserves the support of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I was greatly disappointed when I read the motion introduced by the Progressive Conservative party. I was disappointed because not only is it patently frivolous, so frivolous it is the perfect example of a motion that could be moved under Standing Order 43, as the Progressive Conservative party usually does between two o'clock and 2.15 every day, not only, as I was saying, because it seems to me to be patently frivolous but I was also disappointed because it mentions three items and all three are erroneous statements.

Mr. Speaker, what we have seen today is a sad exhibition of negativism on the part of the Progressive Conservative party; today is one of 25 days allotted to the opposition parties to raise issues of public interest. These are days allowing opposition parties to discuss, if they so wish, government expenditures, the use of public moneys or any other subject such as unemployment, inflation or the fundamental rights of individuals. I note that today the Progressive Conservative party has chosen to talk about parliamentary procedure and to charge the government with wrongdoing in this regard. All we have heard from opposition members is complaints, all we have heard from speakers of the Progressive Conservative party is references to the Auditor General's report. They are fortunate, Mr. Speaker, those Progressive Conservative members to have the Auditor General on their side, this man who is exemplary in the way he does his work; they would do well to try and emulate him, and to attend more frequently the committee sittings where estimates and supplementary estimates are examined.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian public would be better served and the government would rejoice if the Progressive Conservative opposition would really exercise its role in this parliament. The point that I am trying to get across tonight it is that the Progressive Conservative party creates problems for itself. It refuses to apply correctly the existing rules to play its role as opposition. I readily recognize and agree that the present rules of procedure leave room for improvement. Mr. Speaker, I am among those who since being elected to the House in 1974 have most vociferously demanded an in-depth parliamentary reform, yet I am still able to recognize what has been done. I can also give credit where credit is due, and I can be grateful to those who since 1963—that is in the past 15 years, to the Liberals, because it has been a Liberal government since

[Mr. Beatty.]

then—have made valid changes in our procedure; yet I want to carry that further. But notwithstanding that desired and desirable reform to which I will come back, Mr. Speaker, I think that the present rules could be used by members of the Progressive Conservative party in a much more efficient and much more rational way so that if they truly played their role, if they were truly responsible, they would not have to complain today about a procedure they do not use because they do not know it well or because they do not want to know it.

Mr. Speaker, the motion falsely states that for 15 years this government has been trying to impede parliamentary control over public expenditures. Such a statement is unacceptable when one knows that in 1968 a very serious reform was made in this respect with the unanimous consent of all members of the House. So, Mr. Speaker, I will be referring in my remarks to that reform of 1968 and the one which has occurred since I became a member of parliament in 1974 and which is a major event in the history of this parliament, namely the advent of television to bring parliament closer to the people and, finally, I want to make a few positive suggestions for improving parliamentary procedures to enhance the role of members of parliament, modernize this parliament and make it more efficient.

[English]

First I want to look at the innovations of 1968 in the committee system and in supply since these are directly connected to the misrepresentations in the motion before us today.

Prior to the reforms of 1968, when the new rules were adopted unanimously, legislation was not automatically referred to standing committees. Also, the committees did not play a central role in the consideration of estimates. The reforms of 1968 gave the committees a greatly expanded role by providing that all bills, other than appropriation bills and bills based on ways and means motions, are referred to standing committees. Similarly, all estimates are referred to the standing committees.

● (2102)

These changes were brought about for sound reasons which remain valid today. First, the committees generally provide a better forum than the committee of the whole or the old committee of supply for detailed examination of legislation and estimates; the procedures provide for more flexible discussion, witnesses can be heard, and far more time can be taken for discussion. Second, the regular consideration of estimates and the committee stages of bills in committee of the whole House or the committee of supply meant a more superficial treatment of the subject matter because very little time could be made available for each item. Third, committee members can make a more direct and effective contribution to the consideration of legislation and estimates in areas that particularly interest them.