

If I were to judge by any morsel of support I have received in this house I should have to come to the conclusion that I was all wrong. But, Mr. Chairman, I was not wrong. I can assert now that the statements I made on that occasion were mild in relation to matters as they were at that time and as they are still, to a very large extent. I am not going to pursue that further; my statement is on record, and it has not been challenged.

I want to suggest now a change in our procedure in order that private members of the house may be able to familiarize themselves with all these matters and be in a position to vote intelligently on every item coming before us. I suggest that immediately the house assembles for the next session a committee be set up, with wide powers of examination, to which the estimates shall be submitted. It may be recalled that early this session the Prime Minister announced that he was considering setting up such a committee, but that before doing so he wished to consult the leaders of the other parties. I do not know whether that consultation took place, or, if it did, what was the attitude of the leaders of the other parties, but for some reason or other that action has not been taken. I should think that, from the point of view of carrying out efficiently the important functions of an opposition, this would be the very thing opposition members would want. This is precisely what we do in connection with most legislation. When an important bill is brought before the house by the government very often it is referred to a select committee. That committee may sit as often as it wishes; it may call as witnesses anyone inside or outside the service, in order to become familiar with every detail and all the implications of each section of the bill. Any hon. member who is interested, even though he is not a member of the committee, may sit in and listen. The proceedings of the committee are printed and made available to all members of the house, and the time of the whole house is not taken up with the matter while the committee is dealing with it. Then when hon. members have to vote on that bill there is no reason at all why they should not do so intelligently and with full knowledge of what they are doing.

That is precisely what I think ought to be done in connection with this other important function of this house, namely the voting of supply which must be provided through the taxes of the people whom we represent. Someone may suggest that this is the function of the public accounts committee. I entirely

[Mr. McLean.]

disagree. Usually it has been the function of that committee to investigate suggestions or charges of maladministration, something culpably wrong; and we all know that the tendency is for members of the opposition to try to produce evidence of maladministration and perhaps exaggerate it, while on the other hand members supporting the government offer a defence and attempt to minimize it. Invariably considerations of political advantage or disadvantage intrude into the deliberations of the committee; they always have and I suppose they always will. I do not think that sort of thing would occur in a committee on the estimates. A critical examination of the estimates, involving as it does possible recommendations in regard to reductions, it seems to me is not the sort of thing which would involve any considerations of political advantage or disadvantage.

I fancy I hear someone say that this is the responsibility of the ministers in charge. It is the responsibility of a minister to see that his department is run with due regard to economy and care, but surely a private member has a responsibility in this regard also. I suggest that we should be put in a position properly to discharge that responsibility. Furthermore, cabinet ministers, especially those newly appointed, have to depend largely on their staff for advice and assistance. I imagine that the primary object of a minister is to have the work of his department carried on as efficiently and smoothly and with as little friction and trouble as possible. I can quite imagine that the recommendations of this committee in regard to changes, reorganizations and so on if made only by the minister might not tend towards smoothness and lack of friction in the working of a department, but I think such a committee would be of very great assistance to the ministers in running their various departments. I think it would be of great assistance to the Minister of Finance. I hope he does not think that instead of being a help such committee would immediately recommend extravagant expenditures. I hope that is not in the back of his mind; I think that would be wrong.

Mr. ILSLEY: It was in the back of my mind, I may say.

Mr. McLEAN (Simoce East): Well, in passing I should like to say to the minister that some things have been said in this house which perhaps would justify that doubt in the back of his mind, but my advice to him, speaking for myself only, would be not to pay too much attention to the attacks on the