

Control of Government Expenditures

• (1650)

The committee system is designed to make even more detailed information available. The informed opposition should then be able to carry on a constructive critical debate on opposition days and perhaps then call for rather more closely argued and more closely reasoned responses from the government than perhaps now is the case.

Mr. Baldwin: You will have an opportunity to try it after the next election.

Mr. Drury: The hon. member suggests I will have an opportunity after the next election.

Mr. Baldwin: If you are lucky, that is.

Mr. Drury: After the next election we undoubtedly will have another look at this problem of the allocation of our most valuable commodity, time, and will have noted the experiences of the present Parliament. I hope this experience will be taken into account, but I also hope that in consideration of the question there will be a real understanding of the essence of the problem and not an endeavour to construct a facade which perhaps will make it easier for the members to do their business without putting effort into what they conceive to be their business but rather into what I think the system calls for.

I would reiterate that I do not believe the case for the motion and the amendment which call for a change in our procedures has been really put forward strongly. I appreciate that the hon. member for Peace River was using this as a nominal or adjectival exercise, whereas I had the impression that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) really hoped to improve our system. But if the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will accept that the most useful thing that can be made available to him as an instrument by which to fulfil his particular responsibility is information and knowledge, then the suggestions he made do not seem to me to make knowledge more available to him, and this is really what he should be after. The conduct of a so-called scrutiny of a department in committee of the whole is not really a sincere effort to acquire information but merely an opportunity to make points. This can adequately be done in the 25 odd days per session which are now called opposition days.

Another point was raised by the hon. member for Peace River. This was in relation to the Auditor General. I regret very much that the Auditor General appears to have made some comments, not to the Public Accounts Committee through which he reports, but in some other fashion and as a consequence I do not know exactly what he had in mind or to what questions he was responding in relation to the remarks attributed to him by the hon. member for Peace River. I shall try to inform myself concerning what this particular problem is, but at the moment until I ask the Public Accounts Committee what the problem is it would perhaps be unwise of me to make any comment.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to be involved in the debate of what we believe is a very significant motion.

[Mr. Drury.]

I feel that, without question, one would be ill advised to come to the conclusion that there has been no waste or mismanagement on a gross scale since there are so many facts and figures which suggest this is a proper conclusion. I was impressed somewhat by the speech given by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury). I think one thing stands out. He indicated to us, I believe in all sincerity, that in effect we in this House of Commons are attempting to deal with more than we can accomplish. I think this is a problem which is becoming more severe as we go along, particularly exemplified by the passage of the tax bill which, as I understand it, is an imperfect bill. This is readily admitted. There were amendments upon amendments and there are amendments to come. Yet because of expediency and because of some deadline, we attempted to deal with more than we could accomplish. The end result is imperfect legislation being foisted upon the Canadian public.

I was also very pleased to have the opportunity to listen to my House leader, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), and I was equally impressed with the arguments developed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I have come to the conclusion that if changes are not made in our Parliamentary system we can probably call the exercises which are perpetuated in this House of Commons, facades—facades in the committee, facades in the House of Commons and facades continued by ministers—I say with all due respect—before the television cameras out in the hall. In other words, it would seem that this place is becoming meaningless for the member of parliament. We are here to represent our constituencies, to look at estimates, to project and give constructive criticism, and yet the ideas of a member of parliament are not usually accepted. The direction which he wishes to place before the House and the people of Canada is not accepted, and the implementations he would like to see pursued are not accepted. They come from the Treasury Board.

Without intending to be nasty in any way, I suggest that many members on the government side are frustrated. I do not think I am letting anything out of the bag when I say they want a more meaningful role, and they want an opportunity to debate and question the integrity of the government. They want an opportunity to vote in order to register their concern. However, because of the system which this government perpetuates they are denied this opportunity. It would be easy for me to condemn the government's handling of the *Bras d'Or*, the *Bonaventure* and Information Canadian, which are glaring examples of waste and mismanagement. However, I will leave that to other colleagues of mine on this side of the House.

Another very significant statement by the President of the Treasury Board was his acceptance of the fact there has been an increase in the government's responsibilities. He went on and on in respect of several programs, outlining the why's and wherefors. However, he missed mentioning the responsibility that this government has toward our most important asset, that is the human resource. It is in this area that a stinging indictment is due this government because of its shameful and disgraceful attitude towards people. The government should receive the highest condemnation. They should be condemned for their lack of understanding, lack of proper policies in terms of