

Parliament

way with a change in the system. That is a fact we have to live with in this country. The Auditor General suggested some dramatic changes. If they are to be dealt with in a sane and reasonable way, we have to admit the bottom line, admit that certain things have gone wrong. The government has moved to the right with the Comptroller General.

The Auditor General has increased his prestige by increasing the depth of his report. However, the great gap in all of this is not the work of the Auditor General. It is not the fact that the government has moved off from the bottomless pit attitude of the sixties which grew out of the period of expansion of World War II. What happened is that we have reached the bottom of the pit.

The government has started to cure some things internally. This government will not have much chance to complete that cure. In any event, that is not the whole cure. The former president of the Treasury Board who is in the chamber, knows that. The great gap in the process of turning parliament back to the people and the country in terms of its expenditure process is in this parliament and its procedures. That is where the effort must be made.

I congratulate the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations (Mr. Reid) on his ascendancy to office. I hope his disposition improves as he advances in the ministry in these last days. He talked about where the fault lay for the operation and the failure to amend our rules. The committee last dealt with them in 1976. By the way, the committee has not met since then except to organize itself.

When the minister talked about the failure with regard to that, he forgot to say one thing. It is not just a matter of shortening speeches, although that is part of the difficulty. One of the reasons that the three major reports on reform could not go forward was that the government House leader would not tolerate the idea that the Speaker could intervene with regard to determining the length of debates and whether closure or limitation on the right to speak in the House of Commons would be instituted. That was his position. All parties in the House of Commons had some objections to the package. As a result, this latest opportunity of reform foundered.

I am going to say as a new member of parliament—

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but at this point in his speech I have a question. I would like to ask whether he will answer it now or wait until he completes his speech.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to answer any question at the end of my speech. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) put his finger on the central and focal point of the motion. Its purpose is to express a lack of confidence in this government for its failure to take any leadership with regard to parliamentary reform. The last time that committee sat in any substantive way was in September, 1976, a long time ago. That is when these things were dealt with. We have had two reports from

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

the Auditor General since that time. The first one alluded to parliamentary reform. The latest one dealt with it directly.

● (1752)

I am quite prepared to experiment. I acknowledge the work of experimenting in the way the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has suggested. I believe the comments with respect to the way in which the old committee of supply functioned are valid. I saw it operate. I would be prepared for us to experiment in a limited way in returning that kind of thing to the House of Commons.

I am not prepared, however, to initiate any procedure which would put in the way of any government an insurmountable roadblock to its doing business. I want to see a balance between the tremendous power of the executive which has grown up over the years, and the right of this body to bring it to account. That is the direction in which parliamentary reform must move. Make no bones about it, I do not believe the stumbling block is the length of speeches made in the House of Commons. I think that in many ways, as the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations has suggested, it involves the attitude of members on both sides with respect to changes.

The speeches made so far have looked to a certain extent to the past. We should begin to look to the future of this institution. The hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) observed that if this institution does not change, regardless of which party is in office, what we shall see is an ever greater degree of power concentrated in the executive and in the bureaucracy. This concentration of power will be increasingly unchallenged. This is a very unhealthy thing. As the hon. member for Capilano said, the parliamentary system to which we pay lip service will fall into greater disrepute than it does now in terms of its ability to bring the government to account. I believe it is the duty of members on both sides to look at the whole question of the manner in which we deal with the control of government expenditures, the way in which we deal with the estimates.

Committees have their role to play. They should be seeking to determine whether amounts proposed in the estimates are reasonable, that no unacceptable cost escalations are built in, that reasonable planning and foresight have been exercised with regard to every executive decision. That is the role of the committees. It should also be possible to use the estimates to discuss policy objectives. When has that happened in the memory of most members? When has parliament been involved in the development of policy?

Hon. members should be able to match policy instruments with policy intentions. They should be able to ask this question: Is the manner of policy implementation consistent with the objectives of policy? At the present time we cannot do that except in a foreshortened way because of the guillotine. Functions of this sort should stress the importance of members of parliament as spokesmen for the sweating taxpayer who pays the bills and, incidentally, pays us. In this sense we cannot do justice to the Canadian taxpayer. Members of parliament