

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Is the hon. member for Peace River seeking the floor for the purpose of asking a question?

Mr. Jerome: The question probably refers to the member's suggestion to review the committee system by referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. He said that in order to precipitate this course, if necessary, he is prepared to debate every routine motion for reference to a standing committee until he has made his point about expenses. We are quite prepared to examine, with a very careful eye, the proposed expenses of the committees.

I am speaking from personal experience as the immediate past chairman of the special committee on election expenses, which sat for a very short period in the last session. One of the first subjects that we discussed—and opposition members who were on that committee will support me on this—was whether that committee needed to travel. Because there is a system in the province of Nova Scotia that would have been of interest to the committee, because there is one in the province of Quebec, because there are different electoral systems in various provinces throughout the country and, in fact, in other countries throughout the world, there would have been every justification for the committee applying to the house for permission to travel. The subject was discussed and I think hon. members opposite will agree that, as chairman of the committee, I expressed the opinion as forcibly as I could that the right thing for the committee to do was to stay here, unless members felt there was some worthwhile work that could be done.

I am happy to say that members of all parties were agreed. I submit that as an example of the proper attitude taken by committee members of all parties with respect to the expenditure of money on committees.

• (3:00 p.m.)

It is all very well for the hon. member opposite to suggest a review by the Procedure and Organization Committee, but it is only fair to put on record that at the end of last session the government was anxious that some arrangement be made whereby that committee could review all the rules of the House, and do it on a continuing basis. We still stand in support of that proposition. The hon. member opposite knows that his party has taken a position opposed to that. We have been anxious to give the committee not only the power, on an ad hoc basis if necessary, to review the rules governing committees but also, if it is preferred by the House, to give it a standing reference covering all the rules of the House. In our view this would be a sensible arrangement.

That suggestion has met with opposition from the other side of the House. Again I say we submit that the proper thing to do is to have the committee not only discuss the rules pertaining to committees but have it constantly discuss, and consequently recommend, changing and updating of all the rules of the House. Participation by members of this House is what will make the committee system function as it should. I repeat that we are perfectly prepared to have the committees' rules, along with all

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the rules of the House, placed under constant review by the Procedure and Organization Committee.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I have only a few words to say concerning the motion to refer certain work to the Public Accounts Committee. Speaking as a past chairman of that committee, there are one or two observations I would like to make. I compliment the government for calling this motion at an early stage in the session, as a matter of fact on the seventeenth sitting day. I have seen sessions which have gone on for months before any work was referred to that committee. This raises another point. The Public Accounts Committee recommended to the House that its members should be appointed for the duration of a Parliament. That recommendation was acted upon and now members are appointed to the committee for a whole Parliament. Members appointed for a whole Parliament provide continuity of work and research.

We also suggested that the Auditor General's Report be automatically referred to the committee when tabled and that it should not be left to the whim of the government when to refer the report. As yet that recommendation has not been acted upon and the committee only functions at the whim of the government. As a matter of fact, if the government does not want the committee to examine the Auditor General's Report, it does not have to refer the report to it. This is one of the committee's recommendations that should be acted upon by this Parliament.

We should stop and take note of the very inadequate way in which the Public Accounts Committee must function. For that committee we have one clerk. That is the extent of our staff. This is no reflection on our clerk. We have been fortunate in the Public Accounts Committee in that we have had excellent clerks, but for example when we were investigating expenditures in connection with the *Bonaventure*, the shipping company which did the refit came before us with its whole staff and also legal counsel. We did not even have legal counsel although we were dealing with a very intricate problem.

In the United Kingdom the public accounts committee has a staff of 10 or 12 people. They do not work just while the House sits. That committee functions the year round and is equipped to do the job for which it is established. So far as our Parliament is concerned, we are only scratching the surface and I strongly urge that our Public Accounts Committee be given better facilities, better accommodation, better staff and be set up for a year-round operation.

Any government that has an expenditure of about \$13 billion a year certainly warrants a good, strong Public Accounts Committee. I believe the Public Accounts Committee functions as well as or better than any other committee of the House simply because we have done our best to keep it non-partisan. Granted, at times this was difficult, but all members of the committee, regardless of party affiliation, realized they were dealing with the expenditure of taxpayers' money, be they Liberal taxpayers, Conservative taxpayers or others. Members of