

has taken in tabling estimates and by anticipating that the House would support the government rather than my amendment.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is another of those questions which is in part substance and in part procedure. It is always difficult to separate the two in respect of questions of this kind. This is a difficulty I face as well, but I shall try to relate the main portion of my remarks to the procedure rather than the substance.

On the point of the substance, may I express complete agreement with my hon. friend who has just taken his seat, and with other members on this side of the House, regarding the way in which the government has, time and time again, presented Parliament with a *fait accompli*. This blue book tabled today contains many matters of policy which we now realize have been settled. Far too much of our time is spent in dealing with matters already determined before they reach us. I do not like this and I do not think it is good for Parliament. I think the government should lean over backwards to avoid this kind of thing.

I agree with my friend that it is particularly offensive that the estimates should have been tabled today during a debate on the amendment moved by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) yesterday, because these estimates indicate that the matter has already been decided. There is going to be a department of environment and there is no chance that the amendment will carry. As I say, I find that offensive, and this is a practice which is indulged in far too often. I do not like it.

You have been called back into the Chair, however, not to listen to our grievances against the government, for you are well aware of them. You have been called back into the Chair to rule on a point of order. Specifically, you are asked to rule whether the Chairman of the committee of the whole was correct in the ruling he made an hour or so ago. I rise in that respect to urge you to confirm the ruling of the Chairman. What did he rule? He ruled, Mr. Speaker, that the tabling today of the book of estimates does not alter the position of the amendment moved yesterday by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath). He ruled that we may still debate that amendment and may have a free vote on it. That free vote may be meaningless on the government side but that is a point of argument which may be used in the debate. I confess, however, to some mystification concerning why my hon. friend from St. John's East appealed the ruling. The ruling was on his side. It was to the effect that the tabling of the blue book of estimates today with its reference to the department of the environment made no change.

● (5:00 p.m.)

I was a little surprised yesterday that there was not a procedural argument about the amendment. The Chairman gave the government side the opportunity to bring forward procedural argument if members on that side wished to do so. They did not. The Chairman ruled the

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amendment was in order and was properly before the House. The only kind of point of order that would upset things today would be a point of order against the propriety of the amendment before us. But the Chairman of the committee of the whole ruled today that the amendment he ruled in order yesterday is still in order, is still debatable, and that we still have the right to vote on it. It would seem to me that my friends to the right have not completely comprehended the situation when they appeal against a ruling which really is on their side.

While I am on my feet may I just express the hope that, since the spokesmen for the government side have already indicated there is still complete freedom to vote for the amendment, some of them over there will prove that freedom by voting for it when the vote comes.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, we in the Ralliement créditiste are in agreement with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

First of all, we deeply regret—and we have said so many times—that the government goes ahead without taking into account the decisions of Parliament. We feel that in doing so it violates the rights and privileges long ago secured by Parliament.

On the other hand, the fact that we now have to call on your expertise is due to a number of things and mainly to the publication of a Blue Book which took place simultaneously with the presentation of an amendment aimed at changing the name of a department.

Now, the Blue Book just published by the government anticipates evidently on the vote of the House. The normal conclusion is that our present debate is an exercise in futility, not as it concerns the ability of Your Honour, but the substance of the argument.

I feel that the decision of the committee chairman was valid—we want him to know that we do not deny his ability—and, accordingly, we suggest that your good judgment and good offices should serve Parliament, protect the rights of the members and take into consideration the proceedings of the House.

This is one-sided legislation that anticipates on the decisions of Parliament, that scoffs at the views expressed by the opposition members and at their work, allegedly because whatever comes from the opposition is bad.

Mr. Speaker, you will no doubt forgive this remark issuing from a deep sense of frustration: "If this is Parliament, it is only a joke!" If Parliament is indeed the place where legislation is made, account should be taken of the Standing Orders which provide that all hon. members, whatever their political allegiances, must be allowed to contribute to the debates and legislation.

This is why, Mr. Chairman, we rely on your ability and hope that your ruling will be in favour of Parliament and not of the government.