

[English]

Mr. Collenette: I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

Madam Speaker: The questions as enumerated by the hon. parliamentary secretary have been answered. Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Orders of the day.

● (1520)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A), 1980-1981

REPORTING FROM STANDING COMMITTEES

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council) moved:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, the Supplementary Estimates (A), 1980-1981, shall be reported or be deemed to have been reported from the several standing committees no later than May 9, 1980;

That, no later than fifteen minutes before the ordinary time of adjournment on May 15, 1980 the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings then in progress and put, forthwith and successively, without amendment or debate, every question that may be necessary to dispose of any item of business relating to interim supply, the said supplementary estimates, the restoration or reinstatement of any item in the said supplementary estimates or any opposed item in the said supplementary estimates and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 72, for the passage at all stages of any bill or bills based thereon, providing that the ordinary time of adjournment shall remain suspended until all such questions have been decided; and

That, for the year 1980, Standing Order 58 shall be amended as follows:

- (i) by replacing in section (5) thereof the word "five" with the word "eighteen" and by deleting the words "Thirteen additional days shall be allotted to the business of supply in the period ending not later than June 30";
- (ii) by replacing in section (9) thereof the word "two" with the word "four";
- (iii) by replacing in section (14) thereof the words "March 1 of the then expiring fiscal year" with the words "April 30"; and
- (iv) by replacing in section (14) thereof the words "May 31 in the then current fiscal year" with the words "November 10".

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, although the motion may look very technical, the aim is quite simple. It is simply to adjust our standing orders to present conditions. All hon. members know we have gone through two elections this last year. This has affected very significantly the order of business, especially supply and the estimates.

Supplementary Estimates (A)

All the motion boils down to is simply to try and bring back a minimum of order so that we may dispose in a positive and efficient manner the workload accumulated as a result of these last two elections. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the motion is nothing more than amendments to the standing orders for the year 1980, as I say to make the orders applicable to the business of supply we have to face.

In order to understand fully the purpose of the motion, a brief review of recent events is needed. First, we have gone through two elections in 1979-80, on May 22 and in the beginning of 1980, on February 18. As a consequence, the estimates for last year, for 1979-80, were never formally approved by the House, and the estimates for the year ending March 31, 1981, could not be tabled on the 31st of last March to be referred to the various committees of the House, as called for by the standing orders. As a result, the rules concerning the business of supply and limiting the debates do not apply. Our aim in introducing the motion today is to avoid a severe bottleneck that would render the House unproductive. It is to ensure that a fair and reasonable schedule be ordered so that we may dispose of that workload, accumulated as a result of two elections in less than a year.

I emphasize that the proposed schedule is very liberal for the opposition, because it is allowing more time than set forth in the standing orders were they applicable. Let me explain.

Under normal circumstances, Mr. Speaker, the government budget expenditures or the main budget estimates must be tabled in order to be referred to the different committees of the House, by March 1 each year. The standing orders provide that after this occurs, on May 31, that is three months later, these estimates are deemed to be automatically reported back to the House without any additional debate in committee. When the standing orders apply, that is when the estimates can be tabled by March 1, a maximum delay of three months is being allotted for their study in committee. According to the tradition, on March 26, that is the last day of one of the three supply periods provided for under the standing orders, the House of Commons adopts the interim supplies so that the government can carry on its duties and spend until such time as the main estimates are studied and passed.

Also tradition has it that it is only on June 30, at the end of one of the three supply periods, that the whole thing, namely the main estimates and the supplementary estimates which have been studied by the committees until May 31 be voted upon and finally passed on June 30 therefore within the maximum delay of four months provided for the study of the main estimates and the supplementary estimates, such matter including passage by the House of the interim supply.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, if the elections had taken place a little earlier and if the present government could have tabled the main estimates on March 1, the opposition would have had a maximum delay of three months to scrutinize them in the House committees and finally a maximum of four months