

question. Usually, in such a case the minister does not return to the committee before the item is passed.

All of this may be only academic in terms of the argument with respect to this motion, but it is not really academic in terms of the members of this House. I am surprised that some of the government backbenchers have not been interested in pursuing this matter because it is as important to them as to other members. It is our responsibility, to some extent, to supervise to the best of our ability, in whatever forum is provided, the expenditures of government before those expenditures are made. New members of the House will not be aware that we were able to do that with much greater facility under the old rules, when senior civil servants could not always hide behind the back of ministerial responsibility. The problem is not an easy one. It does not concern just interpretation of the rules. It deals with the essence of how Members of Parliament, through the democratic process, will be able to handle estimates.

Your Honour will recall that debates on estimates in years gone by could drift away from the actual estimate under consideration, merely by a member saying that it was not sufficient to meet the needs of the department, or what he considered to be the needs of the department. This was in committee of the whole. As a result, it was possible to get the responsible minister to make a concession that would allow a discussion on a certain proposition.

Committee recommendations are not referred to this House except by majority decision reached by committee members. And when the majority make a decision that a matter should be pursued further, it should be possible for members of this House to pursue it further. I hope that Your Honour will not follow the black and white interpretation set out by the executive assistant to the government House leader and presented by the parliamentary secretary. I suggest that you should consider this problem as serious as that which you are now facing in terms of legislation when committee recommendations exceed the recommendation presented with legislation.

It seems to me unfair that Your Honour should be asked to make this decision. I am entirely in agreement with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre in hoping that you do not put it on to the procedural committee because I am sitting on that committee, and I can tell you that we are experiencing a great deal of frustration in it. As I say, I hope you do not refer the matter back to somebody else.

I acknowledge that it will be a difficult decision. It is an unfair responsibility to put on your shoulders, Mr. Speaker, because as I see it what we are really seeking to do is add a further stage to the reports of committees, a stage that I honestly believe we had when estimates were discussed in committee of the whole house. That stage was later lost by backbenchers on both sides of the chamber. It provided them with an opportunity to raise subjects that they thought should be pursued and debated long enough for the responsible minister to recognize that he should decide those matters must be finalized in a satisfactory manner before his estimates could be passed. It is no longer possible to do that. The question Your Honour is being asked to determine is whether or not that right, which was available to backbenchers, should be retained, or whether or not the Standing Orders are so restrictive to

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the extent of having a majority decision of a committee denied the opportunity of being examined by the whole House.

I do not consider myself an expert on procedural matters, but I think hon. members who had experience in this House when estimates were discussed in committee of the whole should participate in this debate, to point out the loss we have suffered, and our inability to provide a substitute for the opportunity we had in committee of the whole.

● (1440)

Mr. Faulkner: Mr. Speaker, as Acting House Leader I have been following the debate on the procedural question with some interest. I have listened to the parliamentary secretary and the interventions by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and others. I did not feel constrained to enter the debate on the procedural question. Without revealing any particular bias for the case put forward by the parliamentary secretary, I feel that his arguments were compelling and were not really met by the speeches of hon. members opposite.

What has become clear, however, is another point which does not relate to the procedural question. That is the sense of grievance that some hon. members feel towards changes in the rules that took place a few years ago. This grievance may be legitimate but what has inspired me to get to my feet is the suggestion initially put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and subsequently concurred in by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) and less so by the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) that somehow the remedy for this grievance lies with the Chair.

Having had some experience in that position, I feel now as a member of this House that I must say I do not feel that is where the remedy lies. I think it would be an abdication of our responsibility to even suggest it lies there. If there are expressions of discontent about Standing Orders as they stand, they are clearly the responsibility of members of the Standing Committee on Procedures and Organization to remedy. There is no redress to this sort of grievance through appeals to the Chair, thus trying to accomplish something by way of a ruling that was not set out in Standing Orders.

I feel strongly on this point, Mr. Speaker, and I would not be a bit offended if in your wisdom you saw fit to refer to some of these matters to the Committee on Procedures and Organization. That is where they belong. It is proper for members of this House to decide what the rules are but I think it is not for this House to suggest that the goals we seek should be accomplished by way of rulings of the Chair. It was that point which persuaded me to intercede because I think that on the procedural question the arguments put forward by the hon. parliamentary secretary stand uncontradicted.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair would like to suggest that we have been on this point all day, and I wonder whether it is the wish of the House to spend all day on a procedural point. I bring to the attention of hon. members that there are three members who wish now to take part in the