

That the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications, presented to the House on May 24, 1973, be concurred in.

It has been suggested, Mr. Speaker, that discussion at this time is not in order apparently on the basis that the reference to the committee dealt only with the estimates. Although, I do not have the page number in front of me, I am certain that the estimates referred to that committee included an item, or items, having to do with the improvement of harbour facilities. I am certain also that hon. members, particularly those who are not on the transport committee, who are occupied in other committees and cannot attend its meetings, should have an opportunity at some point to discuss this whole question. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this is the time to do that. I submit that today I, and other members from western Canada who have an interest in the subject, should have an opportunity to discuss this matter.

The people of western Canada, through their taxes, have paid substantial amounts of money for the improvement of the harbour in Montreal and for the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway. They do not complain about this. We in western Canada have paid taxes to improve harbours in Halifax and St. John's. We have paid taxes to improve the harbour in Vancouver. I submit that there is only one port which can be used more economically to help move goods into and out of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and there is ample evidence that it is cheaper to move grain from western Canada to European countries through that port—

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to interrupt the hon. gentleman making his speech on the substance of the motion, but it does seem to me that he should be addressing himself to the point of order on whether or not the Chair can receive this motion and report.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I assumed the hon. member's remarks were introductory, and that he was going to attempt to guide the Chair on the procedural point, because that is the only thing that is before the House at the moment. I think I should indicate that it is my intention when I have heard argument, either for or against the procedural acceptability of the motion, to reserve my judgment in any event. So, I bring to the attention of hon. members that I do not think it would be possible to proceed with a debate on the substance of the motion at this time.

This is really a very important matter, a substantive matter going to the very essence of the parliamentary system. To my mind, it is that important. It is certainly the most important point of order that has been brought to the attention of the House for a long time. That is why I think that hon. members, as much as possible, should address themselves to this very important, basic point of order, which I will take under consideration, studying the arguments which will be presented for the guidance of the Chair, and delivering my ruling in due course.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, I assure you that I will not be very long, and I want to assure the parliamentary secretary that, if and when you rule it is in order to discuss this matter I, and other members, will be making pretty lengthy speeches outlining the problem as we see it. As I

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say, I do not intend, nor should I try to make a long speech now.

I simply want to say briefly that there is ample evidence that grain can be moved from western Canada to European ports much more cheaply than through the Lakehead and by rail. Similarly finished goods, manufactured products such as cars, can be shipped to western Canada much more cheaply through Churchill than by rail. Under those circumstances, I submit that the port of Churchill is crucial to western Canada.

I submit that there must be a time when this matter can be discussed, and I cannot think of a better time, a more appropriate time to debate it than on the report made by the appropriate standing committee, which recommends certain lines of action to the government.

Under those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I submit that my motion is in order. I hope you will rule that we can take up the motion and the matter can be discussed, so that the government can at least explain why it has not acted along the lines which the transport committee has recommended.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, the argument put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) is not a procedural argument at all. It is an argument that says, "I would like to discuss this matter, and therefore this is an appropriate time to do it." To my knowledge this is the first time there has ever been a motion for concurrence in a committee report based on estimates. Therefore, it seems to me that the argument has to indicate precisely and clearly just what reference of estimates to a Standing Committee of this House means, to indicate precisely and clearly just what powers that gives the Standing Committee. The third point, which we may not want to argue today, is at what time and how the motion for concurrence in this report can be put, if Your Honour should rule that it is in order. I want to discuss in some detail the meaning of the reference of the estimates to the standing committees.

● (1220)

I know Your Honour and other members will recall that when the procedural reforms of 1968 were made, the estimates were taken from the committee of supply and turned over to the Standing Committees of the House. At that time, the committees were then permitted to do the work which had been done before by the former committee of supply which was abolished. The reason for this was that the proceedings in the old committee of supply were not adequate to meet the needs of a complex governmental system, that the estimates were not being properly examined, and it was felt that more time should be made available for the examination of the estimates by sending them to special committees. Therefore, the question we have to look at is what the reference of estimates means to the powers of standing committees; what powers does it give to those committees to report to the House of Commons?

It seems to me that a glance at the powers of the committee of supply with reference to the estimates will give us a lead as to what the powers of the Standing Committees are when dealing with the reference of esti-