

*Main Estimates*

[English]

**Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River):** Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by making a comment about what the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) said when he suggested the government was following the recommendations of the official opposition in bringing in these estimates. I want to say that this shocking statement will do a great deal to impair my political and social status in Peace River!

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Baldwin:** Having said that, I think I have to preface this question with a few preliminary words. It so happens I was chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts some 15 years ago when the then secretary of the Treasury Board said that we had a scheme before us by which we could make it simple for members of the House of Commons and members of the public to understand the form of the estimates. There were so many votes at that time, and the intention was to reduce the number of estimates and make them simple and more comprehensible. After some reluctance, there was an agreement on the part of the committee. I remember at that time the Auditor General, Max Henderson, told us we were on dangerous ground because, as he said, once it happens, the dam will be opened and all hell will break loose. That is what happened and at present, to most members of the public, these estimates are incomprehensible.

Having in mind the extent to which parliamentary committees develop into legislative abattoirs when they come to consider estimates of the government, will the minister discuss with his colleagues, at least in the limited time he has to enjoy the privileges of power, and undertake that, for the purpose of having a more intelligent basis of discussion so that we can better discharge our responsibilities on behalf of the shareholders of this country, the taxpayers, the estimates of at least four or five departments will be brought into the House, where they would form the subject of discussion in the House, as used to be the case? Thus during the course of an average parliament of four or five years there will be an opportunity for the House, through the question and answer period and the very successful operation which those hon. members who were here at the time will recall, to examine the estimates, which is the only way in which we can get back to a sensible and meaningful method of discharging our duties to the taxpayers of Canada.

**Mr. Buchanan:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is making representations. As I indicated in the course of my earlier remarks, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is now studying this. The triumvirate of the Auditor General, the Comptroller General and the secretary of the Treasury Board are examining it as well. That will deal basically with the form. The question of procedure and how it will be handled would relate, it seems to me, more to the activities of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization; but I profess no expertise in this department. Certainly so far as the form is concerned, we are looking very carefully at how it should be changed. From then on the way the estimates will be

handled will not be a question for me as President of the Treasury Board to determine but rather for the House of Commons to determine.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Baldwin:** The hon. gentleman is a good friend of mine. I like him in many respects and I would like to ask him the following simple question. Does he not consider personally, both from his experience as minister and from his recent brief experience as President of the Treasury Board, that that would be a more acceptable way, forgetting the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization which obviously will not be called into existence before the end of this parliament? Does the hon. gentleman not consider that to be a more intelligent and sensible way to handle the estimates of this country involving some \$52 billion?

**Mr. Buchanan:** It may well be, but I am sure the hon. member would also admit that we are likely not to have the form of the estimates changed before the event which the hon. member seems to be very conscious of will take place, in other words, in the next few weeks. So I really think his recommendations are at sixes and sevens with each other.

**Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster):** Mr. Speaker, in answer to a previous question the minister indicated that questions about specific items in the estimates should be directed to the minister involved. I can understand that he cannot have knowledge of all these questions. However, there are some changes in the estimates which deal with a variety of ministers. Surely the minister has a responsibility to co-ordinate government policy with regard to the estimates.

My question therefore is based upon cuts in the rape crisis centres, in family planning services and in the Outreach and Aware programs, all of which are under various ministers but deal with cuts in the estimates with regard to women. Has the minister a responsibility to implement government policy in co-ordinating the various requests from the various ministers, and is it the government's policy to cut back specifically services to women as reflected in these estimates?

**Mr. Buchanan:** The answer to the latter part of the question is no, it is not part of the government's policy. If my memory is correct, I believe the hon. member directed a series of questions on this subject, as have other hon. members, to my colleague the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lalonde). The minister has endeavoured to respond. Whether hon. members are satisfied or not, the minister has endeavoured to respond and explain clearly that this is not government policy and that in fact there are other programs which to a degree fill the gap being created.

● (1640)

**Mr. Leggatt:** In assessing a particular cut, is it the minister's policy to assess the impact of the cut on another department? For example, in term of the Outreach and Aware programs, a cutback in specific services to women to be placed in employment means the Canada Assistance Plan Act saves a great

[Mr. Buchanan.]