

Supplementary Estimates

mates, the government is denying Their Honours the right to discuss, vote upon or even propose amendments to four bills which they would otherwise have the right to do. Despite my well-known views about the Senate, I think it is appropriate that I point out in an academic way that this is contrary to the rights of Parliament.

I recognize that we in this place are anxious to find ways and means to expedite the handling of our business. Maybe we want to find some way to get some bills dealt with without their taking up any time on the floor of the House of Commons. If we are going to make this decision, let us make it as a House of Commons. If this is what we are going to do, it should be done by an amendment to the rules. Let us not have it shoved into our procedures by the government resorting to this device. These bills in this book of estimates are not a case of voting money but rather a case of getting four bills amended without parliamentary debate.

I welcome the fact that the motion has been changed so that the estimates having to do with veterans affairs will go to that committee. My prediction is that they will be passed very quickly in that committee. I even predict that if the necessary bills were brought to the floor of the House in the proper way, they would be passed very quickly and that no time would be lost in improving the position of our veterans. However, the whole point of my intervention is that the rights of Parliament are challenged by a government that uses this device. Any argument that might have been used for it in the old days when estimates came to the floor of the House does not apply under our new rules.

I therefore ask that Your Honour give this point of order the serious consideration that it deserves. The least Your Honour can do is require that the title of the bill based on these estimates be changed so that you will be an honest man when you go to the Senate to ask for Royal Assent. It would be even more appropriate if Your Honour would rule that the four dollar items in this book which are amendments to the existing legislation, should be removed from the supplementary estimates and made the subject of separate bills.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has raised a point on which I have spoken many times. As a matter of fact, I would refer Your Honour to the Journals of the House of two years ago when the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates brought in a report criticizing the government for this particular practice. At that time the committee saw fit to accept my persuasion and criticize the government. There then followed an allotted day on which this matter was discussed. Not only that, but Their Honours in the other place, in the report of the Senate Committee on National Finance, also criticized the government about these dollar items of a legislative nature. I will refer to them as I go along.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

I do not want to traverse the ground that has been covered by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre with regard to the practices of the House. What concerns me is the apparent lack of concern by both members of the treasury benches and the backbenchers on the government side as to what is happening.

Not only veterans affairs is involved. I suppose that by simply turning those items over to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) thinks he has met the objections on this point. Far from it, I suggest, Mr. Speaker. But there is an item in the Department of Finance supplementary estimates extending the Established Programs (Interim Arrangements) Act which was passed in 1964 or 1965 and received very extensive debate in the House. It is due to expire in 1971 or 1972 with regard to certain arrangements which, incidentally, affect only the province of Quebec. It is the only province that availed itself of the measly carrot held out by the government under that bill. Yet by a dollar item that Act is being extended for two years. What is the purpose? Is the purpose to be hidden from the House? There is absolutely no way that the House can pronounce itself on the reasons for the extension or whether it should perhaps be extended for four years or something of that nature. In the same way the other House cannot express its opinions. It cannot amend such a provision in an Appropriations Act. It must reject the entire bill if it strongly disapproves. Yet on this occasion we are again asked to accept several dollar items.

In 1969 we had 12 legislative items of a dollar nature. The other House sought an explanation in detail which was given to them, but never does the government condescend to give an explanation to this House. I do not want to complain merely because of that fact, but this is supposed to be a government that deals openly. Open government, Mr. Speaker? It hides on all occasions, and this is a classic example of its attempts to dissimulate. No one who is supposed to be a commentator on the scene noticed that the interim arrangements for the province of Quebec under this Act were being extended two years. No one noticed it, and there are others equally hidden.

There are other examples. Your Honour will recall that in the session of 1964-65 the then Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), held up the proceedings of the House, supported by the opposition, with regard to three dollar items which were then withdrawn by the then President of the Treasury Board. They involved the establishment of educational television and other items of legislative import, but they were withdrawn. We object to what is being attempted at this time by the government.

Not only is there the question of the statement made by Your Honour at the time the appropriation bill is presented in the other place or the statements which are made in reporting back to this House; I suggest that even the wording that is used by Your Honour when these estimates are tabled is in effect a misrepresentation of the true facts. We are asked to accept some estimates