

Transport and Communications

because the Standing Order is written in fairly clear terms. It reads that:

There shall be no debate—

And this is the other part, I gather, about which the parliamentary secretary was arguing.

—on any motion to concur in the report of any standing committee on estimates which have been referred to it except on an allotted day.

The motion that is before us is only incidentally a motion relating to the estimates, in this particular case the estimates of the National Harbours Board. Those estimates, as one will see from *Votes and Proceedings* of May 24, are contained in the third report of the committee. I will not read the whole of the first part of the report relating to the estimates except that part of it which concludes by simply saying "and reports the same", namely, reports the estimates without making any recommendation with respect to them. The substantive part of that report is contained in the two items which are specific recommendations and which relate to subject matters contained within the estimates, namely, port development and the involvement of the National Harbours Board in the Port of Churchill. Those are the subject matters about which the committee has drafted recommendations. All the Committee could do with respect to those estimates would be to reduce them, to recommend that they be opposed, or to delete them. The committee is not doing that. It is dealing with a subject matter subsidiary to the estimates themselves and contained within the estimates.

What is before the House is the recommendation that the government consider the advisability of making available to the committee the report on the upgrading of the Port of Churchill. The second recommendation is that the government consider the advisability of undertaking immediately a complete program for improving and upgrading the Port of Churchill including dredging, wharf, grain handling and grain storage facilities. Taking into account the arguments advanced by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and by my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre with regard to the necessity of having some mechanism whereby the House can express a point of view about a subject such as this, namely a particular aspect of something which flows out of the estimates of a department, I think Your Honour may be able to look at Standing Order 58 (16) in a new light. Your Honour might consider that this is, in fact, not a report of any standing committee on estimates, but a report which flows from the two recommendations made by the committee with respect to something that the department should be doing.

Mr. Reid: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Speaker: The parliamentary secretary is seeking the hon. member's permission to ask a question.

Mr. Howard: I know of no person in this House who needs that opportunity more than he does, and I am glad to accommodate him.

Mr. Reid: The hon. member's argument is that this report cannot be considered a report on estimates. If it is not a report on estimates, then under what authority has that committee made a report to the House of Commons?

[Mr. Howard.]

Mr. Howard: I maintain that if a standing committee reports on the estimates, then it is bound only to be able to report them, which is tantamount to saying approve them, or reduce them or it can report that it defeated them, something of that sort. I submit that this is not a question of a specific report on estimates. I realize that this is a very fine point, but I think that it is necessary to look at every fine point that is available to us in order to give the benefit of the doubt to the essence of parliamentary democracy, namely, the right of the House of Commons to express itself about matters of public policy. We should look more precisely at the fine words that are contained within the Standing Orders, so that the ruling may be made on the side of parliamentary democracy, and not on the side of restricting parliamentary democracy. I am saying that, Mr. Speaker, not to you directly in consideration of the way you may rule, but in response to the parliamentary secretary's question.

● (1430)

Mr. Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to belabour the points that have been raised, but I have been concerned about what has happened to estimates. I am concerned about the factual report which the parliamentary secretary made, which I am sure was prepared by the executive assistant to the government House leader. I think it is unfortunate that the latter is not here to participate in this debate, because I believe the arguments that are being used are not necessarily correct in the light of the previous situation and of practices of the House.

Beauchesne is not necessarily relevant to the new Standing Orders. Fortunately, he died before the changes were made, and anything he wrote, that may be related to them, is not necessarily conducive to assisting Your Honour in reaching a conclusion. In a way I regret Your Honour's personal ability in interpreting the rules of the House. It would be much easier if you did not really look at the problem we are faced with, and allowed parliament to develop a set of rules that would be in keeping with the changes we have made. Your Honour has intervened, and rightly so, with respect to the recommendation preceding government bills. This House, and its committees, in adopting the changes did not take into consideration what was going to develop as a result of the operation of the changed rules. Much the same thing applies to estimates.

Under the previous rules when you could convince a minister that it was to his advantages to make a number of concessions in order to have his estimates passed, he would be willing to make those concessions. I had that experience on numerous occasions. I always felt that during the last two or three days of a session, when estimates were being debated, I had an opportunity to get a bridge built in my riding, or a new dock, or new federal building which the minister in question had no intention of putting there on his own, but which he agreed to in order to have his estimates passed. In effect committee proceedings are not a microcosm of what happens in this House. They are a totally different operation. Your honour has not had the opportunity of seeing the frustration experienced by committee members when dealing with departmental officials, and always being told by a senior civil servant that this or that hinges on ministerial responsibility and therefore he, the official, cannot answer your