

the floor of the House. So we experimented with two or three different ways.

We went back and forth and finally we decided, I think it was in 1968 or 1969, to take the estimates off the floor altogether and send them out to the standing committees. That same package which we passed in 1968 or 1969 included changes affecting the legislation, the report stage, the sending of bills to committee and so on, which I think were good and which have worked out well. Somewhere in the process we brought in the late show at night, and we did other things. I think we have improved the procedures in this House.

The one area in which we have not yet solved the problem is with respect to the passing of estimates. We could not possibly go back to the way it was when I came here in 1942. But I do not think we can continue with this process of their being dealt with in committee without a word being said on the floor of the House, and I think some sort of compromise should be considered.

I hope we can look at this subject with equanimity, and get over chiding each other about what has gone on in the past. I trust the House will realize that the President of the Privy Council has a problem which must be solved. We have to find a way to do it. I hope the President of the Privy Council will consider that maybe, despite all the problems he has, we can experiment this year with a few days of debating estimates on the floor of the House in Committee of the Whole on special supply bills.

I do not think we can solve this by simply debating this matter all week and all next week, and having recorded votes. I think it calls for consultation, and I hope there will be that consultation among the House leaders and that we can find something which will solve this problem. As I said in my initial remarks, we are faced with a great backlog of business, budgets and estimates and a lot of things which did not get done, and I think the country out there—

An hon. Member: Whose fault was that?

Mr. Knowles: An hon. member says "whose fault is that?" Is it not time to quit talking about whose fault it was, the two elections and all the rest of it? The fact is: let the by-gones be by-gones. The reason I was prepared to buy the shorter program of the two which the President of the Privy Council gave us the other day, was because it got the rest over that much sooner; it got it over in the middle of the summer. I do not think we should drag the past on for all of this year. As I say, what the country would like is for us to deal with substance. I hope we do not spend all week debating this process, but that we will find some way whereby we can have some agreement and get it done.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, because I have already taken part in the debate and the amendment has been taken under

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advisement. I just have one thing to say. It is true, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said, that about ten days ago the various options were consideration and the opposition House leaders were given a choice. The hon. member came quickly to a decision; he was willing to co-operate, to accept either proposal, but my learned colleague of the Progressive Conservative Party, of course, took no position and preferred having the question debated today, without offering any counter-proposal, as I indicated earlier in my remarks on the motion.

We would have preferred, of course, to have the procedural matter negotiated and settled by mutual agreement or, at least, to receive counterproposals rather than being forced to come to the House to reach a solution that is fair and in accordance with the spirit of the Standing Orders, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre so appropriately remarked, although that does not make us less open to a serious negotiation, if only there could be someone to talk to in the Progressive Conservative Party.

● (1750)

So if today's debate has the effect of convincing my hon. friend, the House leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, at least to reply to the proposals which have been made to him and to negotiate with all the good will that I know he can show, I am sure that if we call it six o'clock now, we can negotiate a reasonable agreement by eight o'clock tonight. Should my knowledgeable colleague not be reasonable, we can go on with the debate at eight o'clock.

[*English*]

Hon. Walter Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am really rather surprised. I thought that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) had dealt quite appropriately with the spirit that ought to exist among House leaders. I hope the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), by what I regard as a rather offensive interjection, has not destroyed that spirit.

Since he has laid it out on the table, I just want him to recall that I told him I would consult and consult broadly—and I did—with respect to what we should do. I did exactly that. As I said at the outset in one interjection, it is not my job to make life miserable for the government, although I think my friend should recall that when I occupied his position my life was made somewhat miserable by open-ended debates in Committee of the Whole with respect to estimates. I think he should remember that. Notwithstanding that, as a result of the considerations we took internally as to how we might make this House of Commons work, one of the ways we chose was not to be offensive to one another on the floor of the House.

We considered very carefully how we might satisfy two things. The first thing was the necessity of the government getting its business done. I sat in that seat. I sympathize with his desire to have business done. I suffered under an opposition which did not give a damn whether business was done. The