

*Immigration*

One of the reasons why it is both necessary and desirable to bring this matter before the house in this way is because of the government's handling of the subject in this house over the past few years. The handling of the subject by the government has effectively denied the house the opportunity of discussing, sensibly and coherently, the question of immigration and the government's policies and deficiencies in that regard.

For this situation there is, of course, no one who bears more responsibility than the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Harris) who for the past three or four years was minister of citizenship and immigration.

As we have pointed out before, it has been the practice of the minister, who as house leader had charge of the day to day arrangements of the house and the responsibility for bringing forward the government business, to defer consideration of the estimates of his department until the last possible moment.

When we had the estimates of the department of immigration before us last session we had them for about half an hour on the next to last day, and for the final day of the session. At that time I summarized the inadequacy of the time which had been allotted to discussion of immigration policy over the past three years, and we made it perfectly clear during the discussion last year that the only reason why we did not insist upon taking more time to discuss immigration was because of the situation in which we were placed by the government bringing the estimates up on the last day, placing us in a situation in which all the arrangements had been made for the closing of the session, when it would have been nothing less than discourteous to His Excellency, who had been acquainted with these arrangements, if we had extended the debate. The government of course was well aware of that. They made arrangements for the closing of the session and they knew it would be impossible, under the circumstances in which they brought forward that department, to devote sufficient time to have the matter adequately ventilated.

We are bringing this motion forward, therefore, at this time because this affords the first opportunity of the session to have a discussion on this matter which the interests of the country demand, and also because it affords a discussion upon which the attention of all hon. members will be confined to the question of immigration and a decision of the house can then be taken. The matter can thus be laid before the house and the country in a co-ordinated and coherent manner.

The Minister of Finance, in seeking to indicate that the matter was not perhaps of

such importance, commented that the opposition could not have considered it very important because they had not brought it up in the throne speech debate. But you will appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that the throne speech debate, while important, does not afford an opportunity for continuous discussion of one matter only—a discussion which will be carried to completion on that subject and on which a decision can be taken.

And we are bringing the matter up now rather than waiting for it to go to the estimates committee because we feel this is a subject on which a discussion of government policy is necessary, rather than a discussion of details of expenditure. We are certainly concerned with the details of expenditure in regard to this department, but we are even more concerned with administration and the policy of the government.

I think I should perhaps say by way of observation that it is our understanding that the main purpose in setting up the estimates committee is so that the details of expenditure may be examined. That is essential. But as we understand it, it is not the intention or the purpose to afford in that committee the opportunity for policy discussion such as is afforded here in the house.

I might say in addition that we are a little bit suspicious that, if we were to leave it to the estimates committee—and we have been told that there is to be no policy discussion when the estimates are referred to that committee—and our suspicion is based on the record of past performance of the government, it might just “accidentally” happen that that department was the last one to be considered in the estimates committee; that it might just “accidentally” happen that that was the last department reported back to the house; and that it might just “coincidentally” be that that report was not made until the last day of the session and we would find ourselves in the same position as that in which we have been placed over the past three or four years.

For that reason we are bringing the matter on at this the first opportunity for raising it as a grievance, because it is a grievance, Mr. Speaker; it is a matter causing the greatest of concern to the people of Canada as a result of the disclosures made last fall in Winnipeg and as a result of the failure of the government to lay before the house and the country a clear and consistent picture of its immigration policy over the past years.

The house will appreciate that the motion which I have already outlined consists of three main branches. The first one deals with the fact that the government's policy is not clear, consistent or co-ordinated. As