

Motion for Concurrence in Report

First, let me talk about the other part of the business of supply, that is, the examination of the spending estimates of the various departments by the committee of supply. This committee, as we all know, consists of 263 members of the house. Under the provisional orders a total of 30 days was provided for the consideration of the estimates in committee of supply. The use of the committee of supply as the forum for the examination of the estimates has been found unsatisfactory for many reasons. First, the committee tends to move at a leisurely pace early in its work and then, whether or not there is a prescribed time limit, with great haste toward the end. Second, the proceedings take place on the floor of the house, so members tend to make speeches rather than to probe for information. Third, ministers, too, for the same reason tend to make speeches instead of providing detailed answers. Fourth, the committee includes almost all the members although some sets of estimates command the interest, and therefore the attendance, of only a few members. Fifth, the estimates often are examined and passed months after the money has been spent. Obviously an examination which takes place before the money has been spent would be far more meaningful and effective as a deterrent to waste and extravagance than one that merely confirms what already has taken place.

To meet these five criticisms, Mr. Speaker, the committee proposes that the examination of the estimates be assigned to the standing committees. This, of course, is not a new suggestion. Over a quarter of a century ago it was recommended at Westminster in the following words:

I agree that after (the estimates) have been presented to parliament their consideration should take place by committees dealing with each branch, military, civil and so forth, and that those committees should apply the scrutiny which the public imagine is applied on the supply days, but which has fallen into very great disuse. I should be in favour of the estimates for the current year going up to be criticized and examined in a series of committees—quite small committees too—and those committees would report to the house. They would make a report, for instance, on the army estimates or on the naval estimates or the civil service estimates—they would make a report and the estimates would come before the house with a report drawing attention to all the weak points or scandals that had come to light, or any means of making revisions would be placed before the house before the subject is debated on any supply day.

This was the view of the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, as expressed on March 6, 1931, when testifying before a select committee on procedure of the British House of

[Mr. Trudeau.]

Commons. This is exactly the view adopted by the special committee in recommending the new standing order 56. For purposes of supply business, the committee proposes that the annual session be divided into three periods. On five days between the opening of the session and December 10, the opposition would select the business of the house with complete freedom. It would have seven more days before the end of March. There would be 13 or 16 opposition days before the end of June.

During March, April and May the main estimates would be under study in the standing committees. By late May and June, the opposition probably would want to bring on debates in the house centred upon, and I quote Sir Winston, "The weak points or scandals that had come to light". This is why the number of days in the third period is considerably larger than in the earlier two periods. Instead of eight days of supply motions and 30 days on the estimates, the proposed rules would provide at least 25 opposition days in the house and a substantial number of days in each of over a dozen committees.

I believe that by adopting the arrangement set out in the proposed new standing order 56 we will achieve at least three important results. First, we will have provided ourselves with a basic time-table for annual sessions, beginning and ending at reasonable dates. Second, we will have provided the house with occasions distributed throughout each annual session for real debate on the great issues of our country's public life. Third, we will have made it possible for members to examine thoroughly the spending estimates and to do this early enough so that their scrutiny can be influential.

Now, I want to comment on the proposed new standing order 16-A. This deals with the planning of the work of the house. As hon. members know, the British house has used guillotine time-tables for bills since 1831. All parties have introduced guillotine time-tables for bills. Indeed, Sir Ivor Jennings, who is generally recognized as a leading authority on the British constitution, has written:

The guillotine, whether formal or informal is... the essential—

I am sorry.

Mr. Woolliams: Read better.

Mr. Trudeau: Listen.

An hon. Member: Read it properly.