

House of Commons Act

Of course, we know that this entails problems for private members. Private members cannot propose bills which will involve the spending of public moneys. The estimates are prepared by the government and submitted to the House, and the House examines them.

Some of the things the hon. member suggests are now being done under the new rules. Under our new rules, after the estimates of the Senate, the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament are submitted to this House with the approval of the Minister of Finance and the Commissioners of Internal Economy, they go to a parliamentary committee. I notice, according to the order passed last week, that all these estimates have been submitted to the new committee that was established during the life of this Parliament, the Committee on Procedure and Organization. These estimates, the estimates of the Speaker as they are usually called, are now referred to the Committee on Procedure and Organization to be examined in detail. The committee has the right to reduce those estimates and to eliminate some of them. I may not be on sound ground, here, but perhaps it can increase some. That committee will report back to the House. It may say that the estimates with respect to the House of Commons should be changed. Of course, the minister and the House can try to put back into those estimates what was taken out in the committee but included in the first place. The point is that the estimates of this House are now dealt with by an all-party committee and can be changed.

If the hon. member for Skeena is proposing that the estimates ought to be formulated and proposed by a parliamentary committee, then we run into the constitutional difficulty contained in section 54 of the act I referred to. I do not know how the hon. member could circumvent that. Perhaps his bill ought to suggest that that section of the BNA Act be amended, and perhaps that would be a good thing. Perhaps hon. members of this House ought to have the right to propose bills entailing the spending of the public's money. As one can see, however, if we were to adopt that principle we might be adopting something that has broad implications for our constitution. If private members either individually or together can introduce bills entailing the spending of public moneys, there must be some method of co-ordinating their proposals with those of the Treasury Board because the Minister of Finance must have some way of raising the appropriate taxes to pay for those measures private members introduce.

A proposal like that put forward by the hon. member has other important implications. Right now the Commissioners of Internal Economy deal with all expenses connected with this House, such as the salaries of Members of Parliament, the salaries of secretaries and the staff of the House of Commons, as well as with the matter of stationery supplies, our office space and so on. If we were to change the system of paying the staff of this House, the important question that arises immediately is this: should the people working for this House have the right to association and collective bargaining as all other civil servants now have?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear. Absolutely.

Mr. Allmand: This is a most important question which must be considered. Some say that our Commissioners of Internal Economy ought to be abolished. Some say that because other civil servants have the right to association and collective bargaining, the members of our committee branch, our page boys, our *Hansard* staff and all others working here should have the same right.

I think this is something the House will have to consider more seriously and something the committee as proposed by the hon. member would have to deal with. Of course, the committee he proposes would replace the Commissioners of Internal Economy and would become probably the bargaining agent for the prospective employee associations of this House in determining salaries and all other fringe benefits relating to employment here. This is very important.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Will the hon. member permit a question? I wonder if the hon. member recalls that a few years ago a committee of this House recommended and brought in a report to the effect that the employees of Parliament Hill ought to be given the same collective bargaining rights that are accorded to other civil servants.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Thank goodness that was disregarded.

Mr. Allmand: I was not aware of that, Mr. Speaker, but I would support that report. Whether we do away with our Commissioners of Internal Economy or not, I think the employees of this House should have the same rights as other civil servants. However, I can see difficulties. The big difficulty in the proposal put forward by the hon. member for Skeena is that it would contravene part of