

ticular issues which are highlighted in the report of a committee on estimates, I think there should be a way to discuss those issues on the floor of the House. I support the things the hon. member for Peace River said about the fact that if committees have a right to discuss things they should be able to make their views known to the House in the report. Therefore, I think some way should be found to resolve this issue.

I have already said, Sir, that I wholly approve of your suggestion that you plan not to make a ruling today but that you will take this measure under advisement. I look forward with eager anticipation to the result of the weekend you will spend studying this absorbing, exciting and interesting matter. I hope you did not have other plans for the weekend. I make one plea to you, Sir. Please do not come back and tell us that the matter ought to be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. That committee, bogged down with trivia galore, would never get to this very important issue. I hope you will restrict yourself in your statement to the making of some suggestions to the House concerning how, within the rules as they stand, we might protect the right of members of the House who are not on committees to discuss matters that were discussed in the committee and which the committee felt should be the subject of recommendations back to the House.

I will stop at that, Mr. Speaker. That is my main submission. It is my view that something parallel to the report stage on bills should be available to us with regard to estimates, and I think the device of concurrence in committee reports can well provide that device. I readily agree that abuses must be guarded against, but it does seem to me that at the same time there are rights which ought to be protected.

**Mr. Howard:** Mr. Speaker, unlike my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I would not presume to make any suggestions concerning how you deal with your leisure time this weekend. Seriously, however, this is a matter of great importance because it, in a sense, comes to the heart of what Parliamentary democracy is all about, namely the opportunity for Members of Parliament to inform themselves about specific subjects that come to their attention and thus afford government the opportunity to know what members are thinking about some particular matters so that it would be in a better position to respond to them. The approach used by my colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was that the strictures on the committee system, namely that it is only possible for the committee to say yes or no or to reduce the amount proposed within the estimates, make the system insufficient for parliamentary purposes.

There is a practice, as Your Honour undoubtedly knows, which has come about through the mechanism of referring estimates to standing committees, a practice which was not permitted to be followed when we had the old Committee of supply. I refer to the practice of cabinet ministers appearing only occasionally before the various committees, leaving matters before the committee in the hands of members of the public service. It is well known that members of the public service, in whatever capacity, are not able to deal with policy questions. When policy mat-

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ters are raised in committees on estimates, and public servants are there, the committee is stymied and not able to find out what the position of the government might be in respect of a particular subject.

● (1420)

This is the case with respect to the item that we are seeking to put forward at the moment. Without getting into the merits of it, let me say that the substance of the question is the study of the Port of Churchill which was made. When that study was before the committee, officials of the National Harbours Board were not able to comment upon the study itself or upon policy matters relating to the government's approach to it. It seems to me that unless we can develop some procedure or mechanism whereby matters such as this can be dealt with, we will be flying in the face of what we expect the House of Commons to try to accomplish.

The suggestion of the parliamentary secretary that this is a matter which involves the expenditure of public funds, I think should not merit more than passing attention. It is obvious on the face of the two recommendations of the committee that the committee was carefully to use the phraseology that usually precedes any resolution that relates to the expenditure of public funds, even in the most remote sense. Those two parts contain the words, that the government consider the advisability of taking those two courses of action, namely, first, to table a particular report and, second, that the government consider the advisability of undertaking a program for upgrading the port. I think that the position advanced by the parliamentary secretary will have no great support in any event.

Mr. Speaker, now I should like to consider with you Standing Order 65 (8) which, I understand, the parliamentary secretary referred to as being the section giving the committees their power. Part of the Standing Order reads that:

Standing committees shall be empowered . . . to send for persons, papers and records . . .

Unless the House otherwise orders. In this instance it could not otherwise order, and the committee has the authority to send for persons, papers or records. One of the things sought by way of a recommendation of the committee is a particular document to which the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Guay) made reference, namely, a study that exists with respect to the Port of Churchill. The committee thought it more advisable not to exercise that jurisdiction to send for papers within the committee where there was no minister available to respond to that request, and where the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport absolutely refused to make any move to provide the document. The committee felt that the alternative course available to it was to exercise that authority to send for papers by way of making a recommendation to the House, and that the House pass an opinion on whether or not that particular document should be produced.

With respect to Standing Order 58 (16), which I think requires some examination also, I will admit from the outset that the situation becomes somewhat more difficult