

Supply

Procedure did in fact brood about this matter and came up with the recommendation that has been referred to in part by the hon. member for Yukon.

What was the case before that? On several occasions during the session, there would be a motion made that the House go into committee of supply. On those occasions there would be a two-day debate with an opportunity for amendment and sub-amendment. If I recall rightly, a government fell on one of those occasions. Mr. Speaker was in the Chair then, and there was a vigorous and forceful debate. Following that, we went into the committee of supply when there was an extensive opportunity for discussing the particular items of the estimates. Therefore, there was a great scope at that time, before we changed the rules and came up with the existing practice, for members of this House to debate extensively, compel votes to be taken and compel the House to divide on issues relating to supply.

• (1600)

The hon. member for Yukon referred to the third report of the committee. He quoted some pages from that report. I should like to go back to page 430 and quote paragraph 5 (g):

A total of 25 allotted days spaced throughout the session would be placed at the disposal of the Opposition. Five would fall before December 10, seven before March 26, and 13 before June 30. On these allotted days the Opposition would be free to select for debate any matter coming within the jurisdiction of Parliament, including the business of supply currently before the House, on motions of which notice would be required.

Then, it deals with a number of motions, so many of which would be motions of confidence and so many of which would be motions of non-confidence. The final sentence reads:

It is envisaged that during the latter weeks of a session these days . . .

That has reference to opposition days:

. . . would frequently be used for debating the reports on the departmental estimates presented by the various standing committees.

Then, we have paragraph (i) which states:

The final decisions in relation to the main estimates of each department of government would be held over until the end of the third supply period so that the opportunity to debate any department would remain open throughout the session.

Then, by analogy with regard to supplementary estimates, which almost invariably are brought in in this period, the final debate would have been left until the last of the seven opposition days.

Now, for various reasons which I shall not go into, this House has been deprived of the five opposition days it normally would have had in the period ending December 10 and will be deprived, so far as these supplementary estimates are concerned, of the seven days which would end on March 26. It is true enough that those days will be made available later on, unless some very fortuitous situation comes about and the members of this House go out to the happy hunting ground to engage in other activities. Normally, we would expect the seven days to be available, but for reasons of which I believe the Chair can take judicial notice the government decided to utilize this par-

[Mr. Baldwin.]

ticular procedure in an attempt to secure expeditious approval of these estimates and the appropriation bill. Because of these facts, we are therefore prevented from engaging in debate, from putting down motions on opposition days, including motions of non-confidence, and from challenging the government on these estimates. By the time we have an opportunity to do so, the estimates will have been passed and the appropriation bill will have been passed.

I suggest it was with that possibility in mind that Standing Order 58(18) was brought in. If we do as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggests, we will be limited to dealing with items of estimates only when we are in Committee of the Whole. There would be no opportunity to challenge the government with Mr. Speaker in the Chair, have a debate or discussion, and then have the House divide on an issue, an opportunity which we would have had had the government not seen fit for its own purposes to adopt the procedure under Standing Order 58(18).

I realize that the Chair cannot be bound by questions of equity and so on if the rules say otherwise, as often is the case, but where there is a freedom, as in this case, I believe the Chair should be vigilant in respect of equity, freedom and opportunity for debate to the fullest extent possible. This can be done only by allowing two things. First, it can be done by having a procedure whereby, as was argued by the hon. member for Yukon, there is an opportunity to debate in this House with Mr. Speaker in the Chair items such as those which are now dealt with and set out for debate today. Second, having done that, we then get into the appropriation bill and there would be some opportunity at least for debate and discussion of some of the items at that time. That is something we will have to meet later. Having this situation and being in the position where the scope for dealing with estimates and debating supply is restricted compared to the situation which existed prior to these rules, and then having the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, who previously advocated eloquently and frequently the right of extending debate, tell us we cannot do this, I suggest is something which the Chair and the House should not tolerate.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I realize we are discussing a new situation and that, because of the adoption of the new rules, it is a situation which we have not faced precisely before. I wish to make a number of comments. First of all, I ask myself whether the form of the notices given by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) are correct. Secondly, I ask myself whether he is entitled to give these notices at this time. Then, finally, I must attempt to relate the situation in which we find ourselves today to the past parliamentary practice and the changing practice of supply in the House. In respect of point number one, which is not really the most important point, concerning whether the hon. member for Yukon has put his notices in a proper form, from my reading it would seem to me that all the Standing Order entitles him to do is simply to give a notice of opposition to any particular item. Once that notice of opposition is given to any particular item, it triggers the placing on the order paper of the motion to which that opposition is taken. It seems to me there is no provision whatsoever in Standing Orders