

Supplementary Estimates (A)

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): He is extremely direct and he calls them as he sees them. In respect of that particular matter I think he called it appropriately, but I do not think that what he said can by any means be unparliamentary.

As to relevance, Mr. Speaker—I say this as you did not make a ruling but made an observation—we are talking here about all of the government's expenditure programs which the government is asking Parliament to accept, for reasons which have been put forward by the President of the Privy Council. I can think of nothing more relevant to the programs of the government, and whether we or the public should accept them, than a consideration of the inconsistencies in what they said when they were in opposition and what they say when they are in government. That is absolutely relevant to the programs. Estimates are the springboards of policy. If the government has flip-flopped and used its political trampoline, then I think the government should be told so and told so directly. That is precisely what the hon. member for St. John's West is doing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, may I ask the House to recall that when I mentioned the question of relevancy a few minutes ago I did so very carefully. I just offered it as a suggestion, thinking that my friend might take it to heart. But when my friend, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton, tells us this is a motion under which we can discuss everything relating to the spending and budgetary policies of the government, I suggest he would not have talked that way when he was President of the Privy Council.

The motion before us is really quite a narrow one. It relates to a régime or an arrangement by which we will discuss the estimates. It relates to changes for 1980 in the Standing Orders. I do not see how that can become a debate on everything. If that is possible, if what the hon. member for St. John's West is being allowed to do and now being encouraged to do by the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton is in order, then this is far better than the throne speech debate because it could go on for two, three or five weeks. Anybody could talk about anything he thinks the government is doing wrong.

As I say, when I first made this suggestion I did so carefully. I did not want to make a fuss about it. Your Honour said that the hon. member for St. John's West might take note of the sentiments. I do not think we should go too far in terms of how far we can go but, by the same token, I do not want to make a big issue of it. However, I think there should be some little regard for the rule of relevance.

Mr. Crosbie: I will try to accept that advice, Mr. Speaker. The relevance of what I address myself to now is that we are discussing a motion which deals with what is to happen to the supplementary estimates and interim supply. We are being asked to grant interim supply on the basis of the estimates for this total year which are put before us. I am addressing myself to the fact that these are estimates, the contents of which the President of the Treasury Board does not even know. These are estimates of which he and the Minister of Finance have two

different versions. I am addressing myself to that point, because whether these estimates should go to the committee or should not go to the committee, or what should be done, depends on how accurate they are. That is the relevance of my remarks. These estimates are not true estimates in the first place. The government has not given this House true estimates.

I am pointing out that the President of the Treasury Board, who presented these estimates that we are being asked to deal with in this motion, did not know the answers to certain questions when he was asked them last Tuesday, April 22. At the end of his remarks during that session the President of the Treasury Board said, as reported at page 298, that debt service charges would be in the order of \$10.8 billion to \$10.9 billion. That answer turned out to be incorrect by approximately \$200 million, because the next day he was asked again. In fact, he did not have to be asked because it was in the estimates. The President of the Treasury Board said on Wednesday, April 23, as reported at page 323 of *Hansard*:

● (1650)

Yesterday, I indicated that with respect to debt costs, the main estimates provide for \$10.275 billion and the current projections are \$10.775 billion.

The next day the minister had to correct the statement he had made the day before about the estimates which he had presented to this House. He now says that the debt charges are \$10.775 billion, not 10.8 billion or 10.9 billion. The day before the minister did not know, and he had to get the information from the Minister of Finance.

How accurate are these estimates that we are being asked to send to committee? For the first time in this House estimates have been presented where the Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board have been unable to agree as to what the total of the estimates were. The President of the Treasury Board said on Tuesday that they totalled \$58.4 billion. The night before the Minister of Finance said they totalled \$60.4 billion.

Is this discrepancy irrelevant? Are we not allowed to consider matters such as this when we are being asked to vote on rules under which these estimates may never come back to this chamber again? I certainly suggest that it is relevant. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has been in this House since the 1940s. I do not care if the hon. member has been here since the 1900s, I say that it is relevant for us to discuss the estimates in this motion.

Mr. Collenette: Who are you?

Mr. Crosbie: Who am I? I am the member for St. John's West. I am only the little member for St. John's West, and I can be put down any time.

Mr. Collenette: You do not decide.

Mr. Crosbie: And you do not decide.

Mr. Collenette: The Speaker does.