

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

into three periods, which have been termed semesters, ending on December 10, on March 26 and on June 30. The most important business of supply would take place in the third period ending on June 30. This would commence with the tabling of the main estimates of the government in February of each year. These estimates would be immediately referred to appropriate standing committees, which would be directed to report them back to the house not later than May 31. In the first semester it is possible that some supplementary and additional estimates would be considered, and they too would be referred to the appropriate standing committees. In the second semester there would be supplementary estimates and, in addition, interim supply would have to be voted before the end of the fiscal year or March 31 to cover the period from April 1 to June 30.

● (4:10 p.m.)

The committee recommends that in total, during the three periods 25 days should be allotted to the opposition for motions on any subject within the jurisdiction of the parliament of Canada. Only at the end of these allotted days, only after the opposition had had their say on these motions, would the house be asked to vote supply. Five of these allotted days would occur in the first semester, seven in the second and 13 in the third. In each of the periods the opposition would have the opportunity to move not more than two no confidence motions. The other motions would simply expire at the conclusion of the day of debate.

In addition to the 13 allotted days in the third period the committee has recommended that a further three days should be allowed for the consideration of final supplementary estimates, if any are brought down during the period ending on June 30. In connection with the allotted opposition days I should emphasize that it is the recommendation of the committee that the opposition would have complete freedom to choose whatever topic for debate it desired. I think it is to be expected that in the third semester some of the opposition motions, perhaps most of them, might relate to the reports of the standing committees on the estimates of the different departments, or they might relate to criticisms based on information discovered by the opposition during standing committees.

On the last allotted day in each period all motions and all other business relating to supply would come on for decision at the end of the day. At this stage members of the

[Mr. Blair.]

opposition would have the right of giving notice to call for separate votes on specified items in the estimates. Your committee considers that the adoption of this procedure would provide much greater protection to the public and members of parliament than prevails under the existing procedure. Undeniably it will provide a much greater opportunity to hon. members to scrutinize the estimates in committee where officials as well as ministers may be examined.

The procedure of permitting debates on prearranged subjects will give the opposition an opportunity it does not now possess to raise meaningful debates on matters of national interest as they occur from time to time. I emphasize again that the government's request for supply must pass first the hurdle of the standing committees, then the debates on the various opposition motions and, finally, the final vote on the estimates in the house. Consequently I believe it can quite properly be said that the house will have more effective control over the granting of supply than it has had heretofore.

On the other hand, the committee felt that the provision of supply on a timetable such as proposed would be of immense benefit to the house and to hon. members. It would enable the government to expect timely decisions on its requests for appropriations. In all respects the form proposed is similar to that which has been adopted by other parliaments such as that of the United Kingdom. I also suggest that this new procedure would avoid what many regard as an existing scandal under existing procedures, where the estimates of different departments are considered in a committee of the whole house attended usually by hardly more than a bare quorum.

The second major area of reform considered by your committee was the legislative process, namely, the procedure under which public bills are translated into law. At the present time any money bill, that is, a bill imposing a charge on the exchequer, must be preceded by a debate on the resolution which, under the provisional rules, is limited to one parliamentary day or a total of five hours. The bill must then have its three readings, the first being a formality. Second reading frequently is preceded by a major debate, followed by a clause by clause consideration in committee of the whole house; that is then followed by third reading. I wish to say that the committee felt general agreement that the resolution stage of a money bill no longer serves any useful purpose. Debates on a measure which has not yet been placed before the