

Procedure on Estimates

express itself as opposed to a particular facet of the estimates. It cannot be done in committee.

If this argument is advanced, I would point to notice No. 6 on the notice paper where a motion stands in the name of the President of the Treasury Board for the purpose of restoring an item in the estimates of the Solicitor General. We want to reduce that item by \$278,000. The reduction is aimed wholly at the police and security planning and analysis group—to the moneys devoted in the vote to the maintenance of that group. Yet if the President of the Privy Council maintains his position, we are confronted with a choice either of voting for the whole of that estimate or of voting against it. No one on this side wants to vote against the whole of the estimates of that department. All we want to do is vote against the provision of \$278,000 for a specific item because we do not support the existence of the police and security planning and analysis group.

The fundamental right of members which is at stake here is the right to debate and the right to divide. The position being taken by the government at the moment is to deny us that right because of a technicality. The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River shakes his head to denote the contrary. I say that when he refuses the suggestion which has been made by my hon. friend from Peace River, as modified by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, he is denying us these basic rights to divide and to debate. What is worse, in denying them to us, as members of the opposition, he is, in effect, denying them to the taxpayer.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: Much has been said by hon. members in this debate about the right of parliament to control the public purse. The Auditor General had a few words to say on that score as well. Parliament, he said, was losing this right and it will be the final nail in the lid of the coffin if the position taken by the government is maintained today, because all right to effectively control expenditures will disappear—the rights of the opposition will be completely destroyed. Surely, the President of the Privy Council ought to reconsider the position he is taking in this regard.

There are three possible choices open to us. We could proceed with the motion in my name, which would bring about a negative result inasmuch as the question would be debated but we would not be able to give effect to our opposition by voting—

Mr. MacEachen: You will.

Mr. Nielsen: The President of the Privy Council says we will. What he is asking us to do is to vote on the motion standing in the name of the President of the Treasury Board. But as I have pointed out, our notices of opposition relate to specific items which are only portions of departmental votes. When the President of the Privy Council says we have an opportunity to vote he is saying, in effect, that we have Hobson's choice; we either vote for the whole amount or for nothing at all. We are not willing to be placed in the position of voting against the whole of these votes; we want to be on record as opposing only those portions as described in the notices of opposition. It is this

[Mr. Nielsen.]

which the President of the Privy Council and members opposite are preventing.

Mr. MacEachen: Standing orders are preventing it, not I.

Mr. Nielsen: If they were motions, I would agree. But they are not. The motions standing in the name of the President of the Treasury Board take precedence, as the minister knows. I cannot see how he can seriously advance the proposition that we retain the right to vote and give effect to our notices of opposition in such a way. We either vote for the whole item or not at all.

● (1620)

The second choice we have is to refrain from moving my motion and to deal with the motions immediately standing in the name of the President of the Treasury Board. If we do that, then under Standing Order 58(10) there is no debate; the motion is simply put.

Mr. MacEachen: No, you can debate it all day if you like.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Until 9.45.

Mr. Nielsen: Then, we might be debating one item all day. Standing Order 58(16) provides:

There shall be no debate on any motion to concur in the report of any standing committee on estimates which have been referred to it except on an allotted day.

I take that to mean that a motion to utilize an allotted day for that purpose has to be made, and if we do that the matter does not come to a vote.

Mr. Reid: Standing Order 58(10).

Mr. Nielsen: That provides:

On the last allotted day in each period, but, in any case, not later than the last sitting day in each period, at fifteen minutes before the ordinary time of daily adjournment, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings—

and so on.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): You need concurrence to do that.

Mr. Nielsen: In order for us to reach that stage, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre says, we have to have government concurrence to bring the bill on before 9.45. Otherwise, we cannot debate or move amendments after that time. The position that the government is taking is that it does not intend to concur with that but intends to hold to the rules, in which case there can be no amendment after 9.45 p.m.

The third, and surely most acceptable, choice for all members of the House with any regard for this institution is to move right into the bill and agree with the concept that the provisions of a bill may be amended in committee. If we do that at once, debate will arise on suggested amendments which will give precise effect to the notices of opposition describing amounts by which we want certain votes reduced. That surely is the only reasonable position for a government to take. If it does not take that position but denies parliament and the taxpayers the right