

*Supply—Treasury Board*

grips with the situation because I think it is shameful and scandalous that we are being asked to approve estimates at this stage without an opportunity to give careful and anxious scrutiny to \$325 million of expenditures. I hope that with the co-operation of all hon. members the procedure committee will accomplish something in this regard, because this problem has caused difficulty for everyone. It is my hope that we will be able to avoid any repetition, and I have spoken tonight to file a caveat to this procedure at this time.

**Mr. Benson:** Mr. Chairman, let me say in reply that the hon. member is preaching to a convert. I am one of those who believe parliamentary estimates should be dealt with in the early days of a session. Two things are involved in this regard. The government must present the estimates properly, and this year we have presented the estimates for next year as quickly as they have ever been presented. Second, committees to whom estimates are referred must not hold on to them for undue periods of time. This happens on occasion and we do not get them back quickly to the House of Commons.

**An hon. Member:** Like within seven days.

**Mr. Benson:** I cannot specify a time limit within which they should be considered by a committee, but they should be dealt with expeditiously and returned to the house as soon as possible.

**Mr. Knowles:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words in support of the position taken by the hon. member for Peace River. We are both members of the committee on procedure, and therefore are particularly conscious of the recommendations now before the house. I hope the President of the Treasury Board can sell this recommendation to his colleagues.

Having regard to the point made about committees not doing their jobs—

**An hon. Member:** He did not say that.

**Mr. Knowles:** I did not mean to be offensive. In respect of the point the minister made about the committee holding on to estimates and not allowing them to get back to the house, I simply say that one of our recommendations will take care of that difficulty.

The significant recommendation is to the effect that unless estimates are passed before the end of the 90th sitting day of the session

the government will suffer the penalty of loss of time. This is true also if the government has to bring in supplementary estimates after that period of time.

I think the hon. member for Peace River was speaking not only for himself but for most members of the committee when he said we should like soon to see the day that we have a calendar in respect of these things. In the meantime we have recommended that we adopt this rule, which we hope will induce the government to get the estimates through in the early part of a session. It is a good thing that we are preaching to one person who has been converted, and we hope that he will attend to the other ninety and nine.

• (9:40 p.m.)

**The Chairman:** Shall vote No. 1g carry?

**Mr. Fulton:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words about the committee system, because I think it is time we gave our attention to it. The idea of having standing committees to which departmental estimates are referred is an excellent one, and an improvement of course in our procedures. But I raise with the minister, the government and the committee the question whether we have not gone too far along the lines of referring every department every year to a standing committee. This means that we have 24 standing committees. That is fine, but you cannot man 24 standing committees all meeting at the same time as the house and its committees are meeting.

I think we are suffering, as it were, from an excess of bad conscience. Because in the past we did not refer enough departments for committee scrutiny, we are now making up for it by referring too many all at the same time. I make this suggestion for the consideration of the committee of the whole and the standing committee. We now have 24 standing committees corresponding roughly to each department of government. Could we not, on the basis that the normal life of a parliament is four years, refer, say, six departments a year for detailed scrutiny by a committee? Then in four years you would have had every department of government studied exhaustively in a committee. But you would have in each year only six committees sitting, and it would be possible to man those six standing committees in terms of work of the members, the committees staffs, the translation service, and so on; whereas at the present time, while I think the desire is commendable, the work