

Procedure on Estimates

Finance. On June 15 the minister advised the House that the government was studying the fate of the government's guaranteed loan program in this period of high interest rates and said he hoped to be able to find a solution last week. Can the minister now tell the House what measures the government has decided to take to protect these loan programs, or whether any decision was in fact made?

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance): I am still considering the matter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day. Is the hon. member for Peace River rising on a point of order?

Mr. Baldwin: Yes, Mr. Speaker, assuming that Your Honour is about to call orders of the day, which involves the motion in the name of the hon. member for Yukon. I have some comments to make and a point of order to raise before the hon. member's motion is put.

I want to bring before the House what I consider to be, after deep reflection, a very serious, fundamental and basic privilege of this House, namely the right of the House, either in committee of the whole or in the House, to consider and dispose of estimates, to vote upon items in the estimates, and to have the right, at least to a limited extent, to vote to reduce estimates, something that has been basic to the House of Commons for a great many years.

Your Honour is aware of the problem. There have been discussions about the matter ever since last June, when by decision of Mr. Deputy Speaker regarding a number of notices to oppose estimates moved on behalf of hon. members of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Deputy Speaker made it quite plain that the motion to concur, which automatically follows notices to oppose items or parts of items in the estimates, would have precedence. Therefore, provided the hour of 9.45 had expired, this House was limited to voting on the entire amount of the estimate in respect to which the motion to concur stood in the name of the President of the Treasury Board, as it does today.

Obviously, this gives me some cause for concern. If there is no other way or means by which this House, either as a House or sitting in committee of the whole, has an opportunity not only to debate the reason or reasons for reducing estimates but to come to a decision on at least some of the items, then there is very little left which this House, or which the committee of the whole for that matter when we get to the appropriation bill, can do about estimates. It is common knowledge in this House—the Chair can take judicial notice of this—that very rarely do members move to reduce an entire vote. Obviously, the government can so put together estimates or items that it becomes completely impossible for any member or for any opposition party to move effectively to reduce the amount of an estimate, because the government can include the unattractive items with the attractive items.

It has been suggested that this right lies with the standing committees which were established by the committee on procedure in 1969, and approved by this House. That is not the case. It is true that, as happened this year, hon. members in standing committees have been able effectively to reduce votes in the estimates in part or in whole. But when that happens the President of the Treasury Board

[Mr. Marshall.]

comes into the House with a motion to concur, and the motion to concur involves the entire estimate, not that portion of it in respect to which the committee had been able to effect a reduction. This means the House is again faced with precisely the same situation where there is no effective way of reducing part of a vote.

In light of this situation we have taken advice and there has been some consultation. I hope that the President of the Treasury Board and the President of the Privy Council will pay heed to what I say, because every member of this House is involved in this question. You, Mr. Speaker, as the first Commoner, the members of the cabinet, indeed all members are involved in an attempt to find a way to exercise one of the basic rights of parliament, which is to move to reduce amounts in the estimates.

I suggest there is a way by which this can be done, but it would involve some consideration of what has already been said in this House. It has been called to my attention that the first time a supply motion was brought under the new rules was under somewhat different circumstances, namely on March 3, 1969, when there was a procedural discussion and Your Honour gave a ruling. At the end of your ruling Your Honour said, as reported at page 6139 of *Hansard* for March 3, 1969:

I have tried to suggest that it would be better to proceed at this point as though we were under allotted days which, according to my interpretation of the standing order, is that, when this discussion is terminated, and no other notice having been given, we should go on and put the motion to the House, that is, the motion that will be proposed by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) for concurrence in the supplementary estimates.

Then, on February 7 of this year the House became involved in another discussion of this point. At that time there were rather unusual circumstances. The government, for various reasons and I will not harass them by going into the conditions precedent, was compelled to use the extraordinary procedure outlined in Standing Order 58(18). At that time full latitude was given the House to discuss certain questions and to proceed as if we were in the old committee of supply. As a result of a point of order raised by the President of the Privy Council at that time, and I think responded to by the hon. member for Yukon, Your Honour said, as reported at page 1060 of *Hansard* for February 7:

Actually, there is nothing to prevent the House from considering these motions outside of the provisions of Standing Order 58(10). I refer hon. members to the possibility of doing this under the provisions of Standing Order . . .

so and so. Then, Your Honour said:

I have even wondered why the House has not taken advantage of these provisions to bring these items under consideration forward for debate before the House reaches the last minute on a finally allotted day. That is a possibility that is always open to the House . . .

That is what I propose that the House do at this time, Mr. Speaker. It may be possible for hon. members opposite or for the treasury benches to frustrate my proposal, I do not know. But if that is the case, they do so at their own peril. They will be attempting to defeat the right of members on this side of the House, or for that matter all members of the House, at least to have a limited opportunity to debate, and to have the House or committee of the whole divide on, the question whether or not a vote