

occasion, the leader of the House for the Official Opposition raised the question. The point, Your Honour will recall, was debated in the House for some 2½ hours. A great many members took part in the debate.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No, it was debated 1½ hours.

Mr. Sharp: It was debated 1½ hours, I am sorry.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): From 3.15 p.m. to 4.45 p.m.

Mr. Sharp: There was a long, detailed discussion on the point; some new points were raised, and some repeated which had been raised previously. I would have thought that for the opposition, having raised this question as a point of order yesterday, would be enough. As it is, we are in a peculiar position today. At the conclusion of yesterday's discussion on the point of order, Mr. Speaker reserved his judgment until today. Hon. members will recall that a few minutes ago Mr. Speaker said that he had not quite concluded writing his opinion and that it would be transmitted to the House perhaps this afternoon. Now, as a result of the action of the Official Opposition, we are discussing again the matter raised yesterday. I question the wisdom of doing this. Mr. Speaker made it clear that he considers the matter to be of some importance and intends to give his opinion, to which we look forward, if not with bated breath at least with interest, for this question has concerned us all for many years.

Today we are debating a motion on the same subject and I suggest that the opposition is not being fair to the House or to the Chair in raising the question again today. Certainly, it puts the Speaker in a peculiar position.

An hon. Member: Mr. Speaker doesn't think so.

Mr. Sharp: I am expressing an opinion. I am not saying Mr. Speaker considers that he is in that position; I am saying that we have put him in a peculiar position. He is to give an opinion on the propriety of \$1 items in the estimates on the very day when the House is to be asked to vote on a motion the outcome of which might be inconsistent, if not contrary, to the view put forward by Mr. Speaker. This, I think, should have been avoided, and I seriously fault the opposition for having raised the question in this form while Mr. Speaker was in the midst of deciding on the propriety of including \$1 items in the estimates.

The second question one must ask is perhaps even more serious: Why would the opposition choose, on one of its six days when it can ask the House to express an opinion, to debate \$1 items in the estimates? When I think of the debates of this session and the questions the opposition claims it has not had any opportunity to debate, I ask myself "Why have they decided to select a question of form, not substance, essentially a question of what should be in the estimates, as the subject for the motion before the House at this time?"

Mr. Mazankowski: Because it is fundamental.

Dollar Items

An hon. Member: Because of the state of the economy.

Mr. Sharp: Exactly: as the hon. gentleman opposite just said, because of the state of the economy. I would think that might have been a better subject for debate in the House, and I think all members, whether on the opposition or the government side, would have welcomed the opportunity to talk about the state of the economy.

Mr. Mazankowski: We did that on Thursday.

Mr. Sharp: There is a great deal of information available. There is no denial of information; hon. members have full access to it. Press reports are available, and Statistics Canada material is available. There is a great deal of material for debating some of the leading issues of the day. But what does the opposition decide to debate? It decides to debate \$1 items in the estimates. I say to my friends opposite that the people in my constituency will not understand. They will want to know why the opposition did not raise matters that are on their minds, questions such as unemployment and national unity.

Mr. Mazankowski: They should know how the government absconds with their funds.

Mr. Sharp: The opposition has been clamouring for the opportunity to discuss these important issues and when they get the opportunity, what motion do they put down? They put down a motion which is superfluous and unnecessary, because they raised the question yesterday on a point of order. I know that the people in my constituency consider such a question as being rather esoteric, a question of form. I suggest that the opposition, in selecting this subject for debate today, have wasted the time of this House, time which might be used to discuss questions of national importance and concern for the whole country. There could be debate about the propriety of \$1 items: I have initiated such debates. But they do not go to the heart of the matters which concern the people of this country.

● (1540)

An hon. Member: We want to know where the money is going.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. The House listened courteously to the previous speaker, and I suggest we should extend the same courtesy to the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp).

Mr. Sharp: The other day my former colleague, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) referred in his speech to the malaise which pervades the House. As a backbencher now, I observe our proceedings with more objectivity, perhaps, than when I was sitting on the treasury benches, and I must say I find myself in agreement with the view of a great many people that our proceedings are too much concerned with trivialities. We have failed this session to come to grips with the great issues. We have spent far too much time on matters of secondary importance. Unless we get back to