

by advancing that kind of argument and urging on Your Honour that the rules changes that have brought about these difficulties are to be adhered to and are good, is completely denying the effectiveness of the whole procedure of referring estimates to committee. What is the purpose of considering estimates in committee if the reports, when they come back to the House, are not to be the subject of meaningful debate and division? We purposely considered the difficulties before placing on the order paper the motion that stands in my name. We carefully considered the rules and we appreciated the difficulties that will arise today. I can say now because of the government's position, that unless it is prepared to take a very responsible stand,—we will not be proceeding with the motion standing in my name, because its position will completely frustrate the whole intention of the exercise.

On more than one occasion hon. members opposite have suggested that what we should be doing, if we want to debate these items, is use opposition days for that purpose. That is precisely what we are doing. If the matter is not to come to a vote, of course it would be a useless exercise and a waste of time today if we were to proceed with that motion without getting as quickly as we can to a meaningful debate on the items that are put down on the order paper.

I want to say something in passing about some of the comments made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I thought I was pretty good at technical hair splitting. I suggest to him that he will frustrate the whole meaning of estimates examination if he confines his interpretation of the word "item" to the whole of a vote. I do not think the two are at all synonymous and I think there is a valid distinction to be made, in interpretation, between a vote and an item. I think it was never the purpose of the rules changes to deny members of Parliament the opportunity of putting forward a motion or notice opposing part of an item. An item should not be interpreted as a vote.

The hon. member suggested, too, that we shall be placed in this position if we do not proceed with the motion standing in my name, which will be the case. I will be making application to Your Honour for consent to withdraw it. If, after my motion is withdrawn, we come to vote on the nine motions standing in the name of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), we shall, according to the hon. member, be precluded from making any alterations by way of amendment to the bill that is to follow. With respect to the hon. member, sir, I disagree with that position. There is a precedent which supports that view, which I understand the hon. member for Peace River showed to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre before he had concluded his remarks. It is to be found in a ruling made by Your Honour on February 7, 1973, as found on page 1060 of *Hansard*. The relevant portion of that ruling is as follows:

● (1610)

The various stages through which a bill progresses (normally but not necessarily on separate days) are intended by the practice of parliament to provide so many opportunities not only for consideration but also for reconsideration. Such stages may be taken to include the passage of any necessary financial resolution. Thus an entire bill may be regarded as one question which is not settled until it is passed. Hence, no objection can be taken to an amend-

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ment on any particular stage on the ground that it raises again a question decided on an earlier stage.

I submit this authority most strongly to Your Honour. This decision, cited by Your Honour while in the chair on a previous occasion, is clear authority to support the proposition that amendments can be advanced at the appropriation stage.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The argument advanced by the hon. member is very interesting and I shall listen to him carefully as I shall to all hon. members who are participating in this procedural debate. I am wondering, however, whether we are not anticipating a difficulty which might arise later on, that is whether a motion standing in the name of the President of the Treasury Board is debatable or amendable. That, of course, is not before the House at the moment. Nevertheless, I realise that the matter is of such importance that the Chair should not stand in the way of argument being advanced. However, we can keep in mind that at the moment we are discussing the situation *in abstracto*. We are not yet confronted with a situation in which an amendment is before us, and I do not believe the hon. member would expect the Chair to make a ruling in advance. However, as I say, the matter is of great interest to the Chair and I will listen further to the hon. member for Yukon.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect, that was only half the reason I intend to advance in support of my submission, because if we are to find our way out of our difficulties it will only be with the consent of the government; in other words, with the unanimous consent of the House.

The second part of my argument is this: Even if the Chair did not accept the proposition I have set out, we could, given a reasonable attitude on the part of the government, retain the right of parliament to examine items of expenditure such as these. We could proceed in this manner by consent. I want to make it clear that the notices of opposition which appear on the order paper in my name closely describe the nature of the objection we take to a particular vote. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre rightly assumed that we in this party would not be voting against the whole of the proposed appropriation. We are only attempting to retain the privilege, as members, of expressing our objection in this way to the portion of the vote described in the notices of opposition.

With respect to the reduction by \$1 million of the vote of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for conservation operating expenditures, that intention is clearly confined, as described, to professional and special services. The same applies to all the other items standing on the order paper in my name as notices of opposition. So, there should be no doubt on that score. We ought not to be placed in the position of being able to vote only against the whole of the item. Surely, the President of the Privy Council does not suggest for a moment that parliament does not have the right to reduce an item.

Mr. Stanfield: That is exactly what he is doing.

Mr. Nielsen: If he continues to maintain this stance, what he is doing is denying the right of parliament to