

*Dollar Items*

not shorten debate too much—they help; but attitudes shorten debate. Opportunities to debate and discuss questions shorten debate.

What has happened in this parliament is that we have changed the rules one by one, undoing the balance in the parliamentary system and overweighing the system in favour of the legislative mill and in favour of the government. There is the burden of the executive on parliament. If we have allowed this, we have slowly whittled away legitimate weapons which parliament can use to examine the government on its performance, its expenditures and its policies. In the course of that whittling away, frustrations have developed and the only opportunity left now for a backbencher effectively to examine a policy as it may relate to him is in the course of second reading debate. I would like to see that change.

I suggest that this government ought to examine very closely the experience that has occurred in the legislature of the province of Manitoba, and should decide whether or not, in terms of recognizing the necessity of the government, on the one hand, to govern, and the importance of the balancing of that right of government by parliament on the other hand, is met. Not just the opposition but parliament as a whole should be adapted to meet this situation. There are no time limits in the question period in that place and there are no time limits on the speeches. There are no time limits on the examination of the estimates there. Yet that place manages to function, and it functions reasonably.

I have said what our concerns are and why we have brought this motion forward. It does not add to the dignity of a former government House leader to open his speech by attacking the good faith of the opposition in bringing to the attention of parliament its concerns for this place. All members of the government side who are not members of the cabinet must wonder from time to time when they are going to have an opportunity to debate an issue. The system which was operated before in this House, which I saw as a university student sitting in the gallery, did give that opportunity. When the rules were abused, the abusers were condemned. We do not have those opportunities today. It is in that direction that I believe this parliament ought to move. It was for that purpose we condemned, as a matter of principle, the usage of \$1 items as part of the degradation of this place.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. As I indicated earlier, I had hoped to return to the Chair this afternoon in order to attempt to rule on the very interesting point of order raised yesterday by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) regarding the acceptability of certain items in the supplementary estimates, particularly those \$1 items which are the subject matter of today's discussion.

In the discussion that followed, contributions were made by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), on the side of the opposition, and by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

Council (Mr. Goodale), the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie), the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang), and the Postmaster General (Mr. Blais).

Ten specific items were placed under attack in those discussions. I will have occasion to refer to them later. Concern with the use of the \$1 item in supplementary estimates is not a new problem. The very excellent ruling of my predecessor given on March 10, 1971, which was referred to so frequently yesterday, with obvious reason, because of rather clear pronouncements in this regard, begins by making reference to the history of the matter and going back to some arguments that were made many years previously. Since that time there have been three occasions when this matter has been the subject of a point of order—on December 10, 1973; on March 26, 1974; and, finally, on June 22, 1976 with respect to Loto Canada.

Much of the discussion yesterday centred around the \$1 item as opposed to the regular, more substantial item. In my opinion, the distinction is unimportant. One of the most interesting precedents relates to Loto Canada, of very recent memory, in which the item was not for \$1 but for \$5 million, which does not, in my opinion, in any way alter the problem which is central to this argument; that is, whether or not supply items contain legislative content. The central question to this discussion is whether or not the government can obtain, through passage by parliament of a supply item in an appropriation bill, authority which it does not have under existing legislation.

In the arguments that were put forward, as I understood them yesterday, there were two central points: first, changes in legislation ought to be dealt with by legislation and not by supply items. The opportunity to debate, to consider and to discuss the two are totally different. Therefore, where changes to legislation are sought, they ought to be done in the proper way of all stages of a bill. The second point is that appropriation acts have temporary duration, being for the balance of the fiscal year. Therefore, they ought not to be used as a vehicle to finance or authorize on-going programs.

Those who supported the government indicated that what was involved was nothing more than regular and efficient administrative government practice and parliamentary practice. These items have taken on a rather special significance since 1968 because of the changes in procedure in that time. Even on a very cursory reading of the excellent ruling of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux, it elucidates that very clearly. I refer to some of his language, which reads:

—opportunity is undoubtedly limited and depends very much on the number of allotted supply days which might still be available by virtue of Standing Order 58.

This opportunity is granted for consideration of these items. He continued:

In other words, under the old rules there was unlimited time to consider supplementary estimates, including items intended to amend statutes. Under the new rules there may be only a limited time to consider supplementary estimates.

The ruling went on to ask if the difference between the two situations was so substantial as to warrant the disallowing of the past practice of including statutory \$1 items in the supplementary estimates. He continued: