

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ESTIMATES

EXTENSION OF TIME FOR CONSIDERATION BY COMMITTEES

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have been giving some consideration to whether it might be desirable to extend the period for examination of estimates, and certain committees, through their chairmen, have suggested that they might profitably spend some more sessions on the examination of the estimates. If it is the wish of the House, and with the approval of the House, I would like to make a motion to provide that for certain committees the period of examination of estimates be extended. I would therefore move:

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 58, the Main Estimates, 1978-79, that were referred to the Standing Committees on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts; External Affairs and National Defence; Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs; Health, Welfare and Social Affairs; Indian Affairs and Northern Development; Miscellaneous Estimates; National Resources and Public Works; Privileges and Elections; Regional Development; Transport and Communications; and Veterans Affairs shall not be deemed to have been reported from the said Standing Committees until the third sitting day before the final allotted day in the present supply period.

I would make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a command to the committees; it is permissive. It is up to the committees to determine their own pace of work, and it is at the request of the particular committees that this motion is being made.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, it may have escaped the government House leader's mind that this whole matter came about because of a request of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) made to the House, and one which I supported, with respect to the very short period that evolved in the over-all work of the House of Commons because of the "off again, on again, off again, Finnigan" attitude of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) with respect to an election. That is where the request originally came from and having said that, sir, I want to say we welcome the extension of time. Of course it follows that the committees will decide themselves what they should do.

The situation, however, points up once again the complete inadequacy of our rules in this House with respect to the examination of the expenditures of government and the examination of programs and policies of this government, which is the job of parliament. It is long past due that this aspect of our rules be looked at very, very carefully.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we agree that this is a reasonable resolution to the problem that has arisen. In fact, we feel to have extended the time of all the committees dealing with estimates would have created as many problems as might have been solved. I gather that the 11 committees listed are all the committees the chairmen of which have requested an extension of the time.

Estimates

While I am on my feet, I should like to join the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) in saying that I hope some day, and some day in the not too distant future, we will find a better way than we have at the present time for handling the expenditures that must be approved by parliament.

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I would like to signify our agreement with the motion put by the President of Privy Council and thank also—that is a rare event—the Minister of Finance who took it upon himself to translate the motion from English to French and to bring it to my seat. He certainly deserves an expression of gratitude and I do so publicly because it is so much nicer to hear that than to hear unpleasant things.

In any event, I think the time has come for us to amend our procedures, and I truly hope, as all the speakers before me said, that in a near future procedural amendments will be brought in so that we can operate in a regular fashion without having to resort to temporary expedients.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I have heard the House leaders in respect to the consent that is required to introduce the motion. The motion, of course, will be debatable and subject to comment. The motion is that of the President of Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) which requires consent to be introduced at this time.

Is there unanimous consent? Order. I am not in a position to hear commentary. In terms of consent I heard the party leaders to determine if there was agreement. Is there consent for the introduction of the motion at the present time?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the words of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen) when he introduced the motion this afternoon. However, I regret I did not hear him state that one of the committees of which the activities would be extended would be the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Forestry. If he has so stated, I stand to be corrected.

I say this because it was only yesterday that our committee met at the request of the minister and the government, and we were told that it was not possible to hold our regular meeting as scheduled on Tuesday evening, at which time we were to have before the committee the negotiators on the boundary dispute, Mr. Cadieux and Mr. Clark. We were informed that they were holding serious negotiations with the United States over the boundary dispute which applies to both Atlantic and Pacific Canada.

We did not wish to create a situation whereby discussions in committee would in any way interfere with the serious negotia-