

Supply

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It being 9.45 p.m., it is my duty, pursuant to order made Monday, March 13 of this year, to put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of all remaining stages of Bill C-31. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the House went into committee thereon, Mr. Turner in the chair.

● (2152)

Clauses 2 to 4 inclusive agreed to.

On Clause 5—Power to borrow \$5,000,000,000 for public works and general purposes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order with respect to the language or phraseology in lines 33 and 34 of clause 5. I say to the President of the Treasury Board that I have checked previous legislation of this kind and I find that the phraseology is the same; but when the minister comes to do this again, I think he should look at the language where it says "as may be required for public works and general purposes." That gives the impression that it is for public works—public buildings and so on. I think the language should be modernized. Perhaps it could read "required for general purposes" or even "required by any and all purposes." Is it not misleading to give the impression that in the main this money is for public works? It is for everything.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's suggestion and certainly if we do this again we will use some other wording.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Schedules A to G inclusive agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Preamble agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported.

Mr. Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time?

Some hon. Members: By leave, now.

Mr. Andras moved that the bill be read the third time and do pass.

Motion agreed to and bill read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Shall I call it ten o'clock?

[Mr. Woolliams.]

POINT OF ORDER

MR. BAKER (GRENVILLE-CARLETON)—REVIEW OF RULES OF PROCEDURE

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I thought this time might be open for us to discuss some things arising out of the procedure today and yesterday that are rather important. There are seven minutes left on the clock.

I should like to indicate to the government, through you, sir, the great importance that must be attached in the next little while to reviewing the rules of this place so that there can be meaningful discussion of the estimates which are the spring-board of government policies. It does not matter whether we support the government or sit in opposition, one of the difficulties that faces all of us is that procedures have developed that do not allow us the opportunity to examine the supplementary estimates or the main estimates thoroughly.

It is as important to members on the government side as to us that we seriously consider changing our rules and practices. I realize it may be difficult to do that in what I think are the dying days of this session of parliament, but I think we should consider the matter very carefully.

One thing that has become apparent is that we do not have the opportunity to examine the government's programs. Our standing committee system, to which estimates are referred, is an excellent system from the point of view of examining legislation. Over the last little while some members have developed an expertise in certain kinds of legislation through their experience and background, and that is good. I do not think that anyone is very happy or very proud of the limitations placed on all of us to look at government programs, however. I know there is a strong feeling in the opposition parties shared by some of my friends on the government side that this is the case.

We have appointed a comptroller general to examine proposed government expenditures and there is a review of how the government manages expenditures and carries out its mandate through the Auditor General. One very important facet of this examination is missing, and that is the right to examine government programs and the workings of government departments in depth. All of us have faced the difficulty of dealing with public servants in standing committees. They are well informed, and therefore the government and the minister are very well informed; but they are faced by members of parliament, and not just members of the opposition, who are not well informed.

After going through what can only be described as a charade—and I do not use that word in a pejorative way but as a member of parliament looking at millions and millions of dollars of estimates—we have to admit we do not deal with the estimates at great length.

It may be claimed that some members are not capable of looking at them, but that argument will only be used as a means of turning the issue away. I think we must look at our committees, not only from the point of view of examining the