

Transport and Communications

procedural debate. The Chair can, according to Standing Orders and precedent, suggest that there has been sufficient argument submitted for the guidance of the Chair but I would not want to do this at all if there are other hon. members who want to rise. There is the hon. member for St. Catharines (Mr. Morgan), the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson), the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) and others, but I think hon. members should bear in mind that we will have spent the whole of one day in debate on one single procedural point. The hon. member for Laprairie.

Mr. Watson: Mr. Speaker, I want to make an extremely short point. It seems to me that the direction we have been taking in this House of Commons with regard to the committee system is that we give an expanded role to the committees. If we prevent our committees when they are reporting on estimates from adding to their report then, in a sense, we are abdicating our committee role.

I just want to make the point that I am strongly in favour of expansion of the role of our committees and anything that restricts it is not in the long-term interests of this House or the Canadian people.

Mr. Baker: Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to participate in this debate but perhaps I have had some experience in this House beyond my entry on January 4, 1973. When I was attending Carleton University in the 1950's I used to sit up in that place near the attractive lady in the red—

Some hon. Members: Order, order!

Mr. Baker: I used to watch the debates here in the days when in fact all the debates occurred in the House. I found there was much more participation in those days and attendance was much better than it is today. Perhaps the fact of the present rules has much to do with the attendance. There seems to be no opportunity yet in the House to speak on those things which are only broad principles.

I disagree with my friend, the hon. Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner) that the remedy ought not to be left to the Chair. I think the remedy is within the province of the Chair, as well as perhaps the committee to which he refers. Very often, the Chair is the unanimous choice of this House, Mr. Speaker, and I think that any input you would like to make with respect to this would be very well received by all members of this House.

As a new Member of Parliament I want to say that I find the committee system extremely frustrating.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker: I find that most chairmen are quite reasonable and members on all sides of this House are attempting to be quite reasonable, but as a matter of fact when a member is restricted to ten minutes within which to enter into a very important subject, perhaps something that affects the national interest, it is impossible to have a discussion of the very guts of the operation of government, namely the estimates.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker: I say, as a new member who had an opportunity which perhaps some older members who spoke

[Mr. Speaker.]

today did not have, namely to look at the older procedure, that there must be some way found. I suspect that the wisdom of the Chair may be the vehicle by which it can be found that we can marry the goodness of the old, which was participation, with the goodness of the new, which is the moving in on a particular point. Perhaps the suggestions made by the hon. member for Peace River, which I think are supported by my friend and neighbour the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, are the direction we should take.

My intervention in this debate was unexpected, but I have had an opportunity to see the old system work and I think it had more virtue. I do not think we can dispose of the matter as simply as the Secretary of State saw fit to dispose of it this afternoon. I feel the greatest frustrations as a new member of this House and I have never felt so constrained in anything I have ever done as I have as a member of any committee of this House. I do not fault the chairmen, I want to make that clear; I fault the system. I do not think the system we have now is the best that allows the fullest and most complete examination of the estimates.

I apologize for prolonging this debate but I felt that I must intervene in view of what my friend, the Secretary of State had said.

Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I shall be extremely short. In making up your mind I think you must take into consideration the frustration of Members of Parliament under the present system. I disagree with the hon. Secretary of State (Mr. Faulkner). I think this is an evolutionary process, and that, as in our common law system, we should not take the narrow hidebound rules but must move and float along. When parliament is being frustrated, then I suggest we should use the common law approach and let things gradually progress.

I think with all due respect that this is a thought that you can perhaps keep in mind in your deliberations so that everything is done and that the will of parliament is not frustrated as I think it would be if we were to take the very hidebound definition of Standing Orders 65 and 58. I think it can be expanded; language and thought can be melded into those two sections to make it possible for Your Honour to do what parliament wishes to be done.

● (1450)

Mr. Speaker: I will simply thank all hon. members who took the Chair at its word when the suggestion was made by the Chair this morning that this is an important point of order and that I would welcome the advice of all hon. members, which I received and will certainly consider. There are some thoughts that are coming to my mind at present, and I think it would be unwise to express them without giving the whole matter, in all its aspects, the serious consideration it deserves, which I will do at the first opportunity. Again, I assure all hon. members that I will take into account all the views which have been expressed and perhaps some which have not been expressed today but which I know are in the minds of some hon. members who have spoken to me on past occasions or who have made comments on other occasions about this general problem of reports of committee and the general operation of our committee system under the new