RADIO TALK - 21st October, 1956.

Parliament and the Budget.

Last week the House of Representatives finished the debate on the Estimates and for the rest of this Session we will be largely concerned with small and relatively unimportant Bills which will carry into effect the many changes announced in the Budget. I believe it is not always readily understood how Parliament works in these matters and so tonight I want to take a few minutes to explain the procedure of passing the Budget through the House of Representatives.

In the first place for a period of two or three weeks the Budget as a whole is debated, the Speaker is in the Chair and Members should confine themselves to the broad issues of national policy. The Budget debate itself is not necessarily the time to pick out minor details or to criticise small points of difference in opinion for there is a specific time to do this later in the debate on the Estimates.

The Opposition in accordance with its duties to oppose the Government in the Federal House nearly always moves a notice of censure on the Government. This is done by moving that the first item in the Budget be reduced by £1. This might seem a strange way of showing disapproval of a Budget that totals over £1,000,000,000 but it is the traditional form which has been followed by Oppositions during the years. This year Dr. Evatt's censure motion was defeated by a decisive majority.

When the Budget as a whole has been passed the House then resolves itself into committee. Here I would like to say that all finance bills or financial measures must pass through the committee stage of the House. This again is the traditional form of procedure inherited from the British Parliament.

When the House is in committee the Speaker leaves the Chair and the House is kept in order and the Standing Orders are maintained by the Chairman of Committees or by one of his deputies.
These chairmen don't sit in the Speaker's place which is raised above the floor of the House but they do sit at the table in the centre of the Chamber between the two Clerks of the House who are constantly in attendance.

During the Estimates the Government moves the guillotine and this it must do if business is to proceed without undue waste of time. It is again the traditional and customary procedure, although it may seem that the rights and privileges of Members to speak on certain items are limited by bringing the guillotine. It is in fact generally done and worked out between the Government's Leader in the House who was Sir Eric Harrison and now Mr. Harold Holt, the Minister for Labour and National Service and for Immigration and his counterpart on the Opposition side, that is Mr. Caldwell. All the guillotine does is to set the time limit for the various groups of Departments. These may be banded together, two, three or four Departments at a time and then each group is taken and debated in turn for a fixed period, after which the House will pass on to the next group of Departments.

Members may speak twice for a period of 15 minutes on each group of Departments and in general it is found that everyone who wants to speak on any particular subject can do so although it is equally true that if a particularly contentious subject arises concerning any particular Department then there will be some people who will not be able to speak on that subject because of the time limit.

It is during the Estimates debate that Members should pick out detailed points which they believe require criticism of one kind or another. It is here that Members can debate more properly the administration of any particular Department concerning the things that they have done or the things which in the view of the Member the Department should have done. While the Departments are being criticised the appropriate Ministers will be sitting at the Table of the House, and as points are brought up which they believe require a reply for the information of Members and of the
country they will rise to their feet to explain or to defend their Department's policy.

At the end of last week the Estimates for the final group of Departments were passed through the House of Representatives, which means that the Budget in general and in detail for the year 1956/57 has become the law of the land. After it has received the Senate's approval and the Governor's proclamation...
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