

Effect of Budgetary Proposals

• (1520)

Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you that what the Leader of the Opposition has placed before the House amounts quite simply to a combination of two issues, the effect of the reductions to corporations and accelerated depreciation allowance write-offs contained in the budget of 1972, and the proposals contained in the budget of February, 1973. How could any reasonable person suggest that these could be compared in any way with the subject of the vote which was taken in this House last Wednesday?

I do not intend to stop at this point. I believe there is an issue here so fundamental and so important that the House should consider what is involved. The procedure under which we presently examine budgetary measures and supply measures was introduced following proposals which were considered in 1968 and 1969 after discussion by the Committee on Procedure and Organization. What has been the situation, traditionally? It has always been fundamental to the parliamentary system of government that supply cannot and should not be granted until there has been every opportunity to seek redress of grievances. This is a right which goes back to Cromwell and Charles I, and it has been embodied in our system of supply, in the way in which parliament deals with the voting of money to the government.

In the course of the debate which took place at the time the present rules were considered, some interesting comments were made. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in one of his rare contributions to our debates, had this to say on December 10, 1968, as reported in *Hansard* at page 3784 of Volume IV, 1968-69:

For purposes of supply business the Committee proposes that the annual session be divided into three periods. On five days between the opening of the session and December 10, the opposition would select the business of the House with complete freedom.

I underline the words "with complete freedom". A similar thought was expressed by Mr. Gordon Blair, then a Member of Parliament and chairman of the select committee:

In connection with allotted opposition days I would emphasize that it is the recommendation of the Committee that the opposition would have complete freedom to choose whatever topic for debate it desires.

These are words which the Chair should bear in mind in reaching a decision on this particular proposal.

Then again, the report of the Committee on Procedure and Organization dated March 13, 1968 contains the following words with reference to a proposal to alter the manner of dealing with supply—there had been some discussion about British practice:

The British practice, while it avoids discussion of the estimates items, has the great value that it permits the Opposition to explore whatever shortcomings, either small or great, it detects in the policies and conduct of the ministry before supply is voted.

These are very wide words and must be read in conjunction with the rule which is not being considered. The report continues:

If our sessions were normally to begin in October it should be possible to complete the business of supply before the end of June. If the Opposition had entirely at its disposal a certain number of allotted days to be taken between the day on which the Address in

[Mr. Baldwin.]

Reply is adopted and the end of June, the Opposition would then have an adequate opportunity to publicize the shortcomings it sees in the ministry.

Following the debate on the tabling of this report and the adoption of the new rules, the new rules came into being. They replaced the practice of permitting the widest possible discussion on the motion to go into supply, at which time any matter, any issue, could be debated. This had been the practice for many years. It is the substitution for this practice which we are now considering.

I recognize that Your Honour's attention has been drawn to a precedent which appears in Beauchesne, paragraph 201, but it is surely incumbent upon the Chair to exercise the utmost vigilance in circumstances such as these. Even if this motion were closer to the line than it is, there would be a heavy responsibility upon the Chair to look very sharply indeed at any argument which sought to limit the opportunities available to the opposition to discuss shortcomings in the policies of the government before granting supply. This is the fundamental issue before us. Your Honour is, in effect, being urged to restrict the limited rights which this House presently enjoys to call attention to shortcoming, to bring forward grievances and to seek redress. This would be the result if the Chair were to give effect to what the government House leader is urging.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: Throughout the session, questions addressed to the Minister of Finance have had the effect of making a clear distinction between the budget proposals in May, 1972 and the budget proposals of February 19, 1973. For example, as recorded at page 22 of *Hansard* of January 5, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) asked the Minister of Finance the following question:

In view of the indication that the bills left over from his old budget relating to income tax, corporation income tax and so on will be reintroduced, is it the intention of the minister that the House consider these bills immediately or that they should be considered at the time he presents his new budget in 1973?

The minister's answer made it quite plain that he recognized this distinction.

On February 6, as reported at pages 993 and 994, the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) put this question to the Minister of Finance:

May I ask the Minister of Finance one or two questions on the general subject which has been raised? May I ask whether, in view of the fact that the reduction in corporate taxes and the accelerated write-off in respect of certain machinery and equipment which he proposed last May were justified by him on the basis of the need to protect Canadian manufacturing against the Disc program in the United States, and in view of the fact that all information so far has shown that the effect of the Disc program has been minimal on Canadian manufacturing, he is now reconsidering the corporation rip-off which he proposed last May?

The Minister of Finance made it quite clear in his answer that he recognized this distinction clearly existed between what he intended to do in the budget to be brought in, and the budgetary proposals of May, 1972.