

Senator Stewart: The government will need that money in about two weeks. If I recall correctly, the normal process is that the committee has a chance to look at the Main Estimates, and then questions are asked. We understand why you want three-twelfths. You do not need to answer that, but there will be cases where the government wants seven-twelfths. Perhaps it wants to start construction. Good answers can be given. In other cases, the answers will be more esoteric, but there should be an opportunity for those questions to be asked and answered before we give interim supply against the total. We should be able to do that expeditiously, but I do think we ought not to pass the bill until we have had an opportunity to get some answers.

Senator Frith: The point Senator Stewart is making is that while it is not customary, or even relevant, to talk about the whole of the Main Estimates when dealing with interim supply, it is relevant to talk about interim supply or, in other words, why you do not automatically, as Senator Stewart says, get interim supply just by asking for it. In fact, usually the government has a reason for asking for the interim supply. They get the answers, as Senator Stewart puts it. Therefore, it is quite relevant for us to want to talk about interim supply. Of course a good question, which they may have an answer to, is why do you want interim supply to protect yourself with a contingency fund? There may be an answer to that, but Senator Stewart's point is that those questions are usually asked and answered in the committee before interim supply is granted.

Hon. Roch Bolduc: We will meet next Wednesday afternoon on the Main Estimates. At that time, we could perhaps have a look at questions concerning Bill C-120.

Senator Stewart: Exactly.

Senator Olson: That is a proposal of the government, fine. Perhaps the government whip can find us an opportunity to meet earlier than Wednesday.

Senator Molgat: There is no need.

Senator Olson: But there is one problem that I do not think has arisen before. We are being asked to approve Bill C-120, the appropriation bill, without having had one meeting on the Main Estimates. In the past, there have always been one or two meetings.

Senator Bolduc: I may be wrong, but I think the honourable senator wants to ask questions about the interim supply. We could do that next Wednesday when we begin to review the Main Estimates.

Senator Olson: There is no problem with that; I understand that. This is a matter of putting the cart before the horse. You want to pass the bill before we have had a chance to ask one single question.

Senator Molgat: No, second reading only.

Senator Olson: Well, perhaps we can come to an agreement.

I do not want to say any more at this time. The committee members and I will raise questions in the committee, not here. There is no doubt about that.

Senator Frith: We are on track.

On December 16, 1992, the same question was raised; how the passage of such a bill is without prejudice to a position on the Main Estimates in due course. I will quote from page 2523 of the *Debates of the Senate*:

I pause here in remembrance of Senator Grossart, since he always very carefully insisted that an undertaking be given to the effect that the passing of this type would not prejudice the rights and privileges of members to criticize any item in the estimates when it came up for consideration in committee. The usual undertaking is hereby given that such rights and privileges will be respected and will not be curtailed or restricted in any way as a result of the passing of this measure.

That is the phrase I was looking for.

• D (1530)

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, it is understood that we will give the bill second reading and refer it to committee. At that point we will have some substantial questions. There are six schedules to the bill, each one with a different time running from eleven-twelfths down to three-twelfths. I find it surprising, however, that the House of Commons would proceed to deal with this bill in all stages in one day.

Senator Lynch-Staunton: Half an hour.

Senator Olson: We are more responsible than they are.

Senator Molgat: It seems to me inconceivable that Parliament, which was originally established to control expenditures of the Crown, would deal in such summary fashion with this essential purpose of Parliament.

Senator Bolduc: It is the usual procedure, because the Estimates have no definite impact. The Estimates go on and we study them for months and months. I do not see the problem, really.

Senator Molgat: I agree that it may be somewhat academic, but it seems to me that if we ran our business properly we would have all the Estimates cleared beforehand. We should change the schedule of preparing Estimates so that they are prepared before the end of the fiscal year. That is the way I would run a business. Frankly, from my background in the provincial legislature, I know that is the way it was run there.