

Business of the House

Mr. Horner: The hon. member says I could not sell that to my constituents. I could sell that argument much more easily than I could sell this closure. It is important to improve legislation when it has been so poorly drafted in the first instance. The government has brought forward omnibus bills which encompassed too many subject matters. They have been poorly drafted. That is why the government from time to time has had to introduce amendments in order to get bills through the House of Commons.

The comparison that the hon. member for Sudbury made between the Parliament of Canada and the British Parliament is not valid. In the British Parliament 630-odd members are elected. The government controls a country which could be put inside any one of our provinces except Prince Edward Island. There you see the difference. Ours is a vast country, stretching from the Pacific to the Atlantic. It is regional in its makeup and that is why it is all the more important for us to protect our freedom of speech as soon as it is threatened by an arrogant government, no matter what that government may be called.

The Minister of Justice made some interesting remarks. He said the bill is not perfect. He also said that the opposition, in delaying passage of the bill, is causing great economic havoc across the country. If the bill in its present form is passed, havoc will be caused across the country for the next ten years because there will be case after case before the courts. People will try to determine the meaning of the bill and they will want to see how various sections should be interpreted.

Speaking in Vancouver on November 18 on the tax bill, the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Gray), who will have to interpret the sections of the act and collect the taxes, said in part:

Once tax reform comes into effect, the increased need by the taxpayer for rulings and interpretations will make greater demands on the limited numbers of staff engaged in the work.

He went on to say:

I am concerned about the problem involved in finding additional staff that will be needed.

It is no secret when I suggest that once the bill comes into effect the real confusion will start. There will be much litigation and case after case before the courts in an attempt to interpret the exact meaning of the sections of the bill. No doubt there will be much confusion about it. There is validity to the remarks of the Minister of Justice when he says that the country is concerned about the tax bill and concerned about the application of the capital gains tax. The only way of alleviating or overcoming that concern is for the government to take the course suggested by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). Let it split the tax bill, pass those sections dealing with increased exemptions and tax cuts, and deal with the rest of it later after those parts have been more fully debated, improved, and accepted by the provinces.

At the federal-provincial conference here in Ottawa, which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) attended about two weeks ago, five provinces said that the bill in its present form ought not to be proceeded with now. They said it was too complicated, that they did not know how it would fit into provincial tax structures. Surely, if we believe at all in co-operative federalism, when five of the

provinces, containing well over 50 per cent of the population, ask that a bill should not be proceeded with, the government should pay some attention to their views. But here we have a government which pays no heed to the wishes of the provinces and as a result there is confusion and concern across the country.

• (4:10 p.m.)

Some members assert that a decision must be taken, that they were elected on June 8, 1968, and the fact of their election gives them the right to do anything they please. Mr. Speaker, in a responsible parliament it does not. They can administer the country, but when it comes to new tax measures they must bring them before Parliament and be responsible to Parliament. In the same way, if it is thought there may be too much filibustering, everyone in the opposition is ultimately responsible to the people. This is really what is meant by responsible government.

If cabinet ministers feel they can go across the country in the next election and kiss a few babies, dive off a few high-diving boards, do a back flip or two and win the support of the people they are being badly fooled. The people of Canada have seen all the arrogance they want and they do not need the government to demonstrate it to them any more. In the next election they will want to see evidence of a concerted policy, a clear statement of what the government intends to do.

Where is the Minister of Finance? Where has he been during this debate? He has not been here during this debate. And he will not be around during the next election, the papers say. Where is the Prime Minister? He left the House shortly after some of the initial statements were made. Can he not stand the heat? I see his parliamentary secretary is here, but he is not responsible except for keeping the Prime Minister out of trouble, something he failed to do when he was in Russia with him. These ministers are not around. They do not want to contribute anything to the work of this Parliament. They believe they have a supreme right to rule and do whatever they want to do.

Implementation of closure convinces me, and will convince everybody across the country, that the government believes it has a divine right to rule and that it can continue to rule no matter what happens. Their attitude is somewhat reminiscent of Joey Smallwood's attitude in Newfoundland. This government feels exactly the same way as he does. They thought of calling an election last fall, but they did not do so because they became a little worried; they did not know whether they could blame all Canada's troubles on the United States. They will get their tax bill, apparently, after closure, and then their troubles will begin. They will not call an election next year either; they will go to the limit and then the Prime Minister will find some reason for not calling an election at all. He will find trouble in one of the provinces among the ten and then say there will not be an election at all. For the moment, though, it is a case of an arrogant government using closure to impose its will.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise briefly under the provisions of Standing Order 37(1).