

Supplementary Estimates

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Surely, Mr. Speaker, on the second reading of an appropriation bill it is appropriate to talk about any item in the appropriation bill and it cannot be out of order for the minister to talk about an item in a general way or explain the policy which the government may be following in that regard.

Mr. Lang: On the same point of order; although I was referring to certain things that had been said by the hon. member for Peace River it was my purpose to talk generally about the item, not to discuss it specifically in relation to the amendment which was so properly ruled out of order by the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: The point raised by the President of the Privy Council is well taken. It was my understanding there had been agreement that this debate would be—

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): No.

Mr. Speaker: The minister says no. I may say I had already reached that conclusion when I heard him raise his point of order. The minister now has the floor and may make his contribution to the debate on the subject he chooses. I am informed, now, that other hon. members are anxious to take part in the discussion and deal with other points.

An hon. Member: It is wide open.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): But is it not one of our rules, Mr. Speaker, that on second reading we should not refer to particular clauses of a bill? Are we not running afoul of that rule if a debate is permitted on just one item in the schedule. What I am trying to do, I suppose, by raising a point of order, is to make an appeal to common sense. Would it not be better to give the bill second reading, get it into committee, come to the schedule and then have a full debate on item 17b, at which time the minister can make the speech he wishes to make now.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The hon. member of Peace River chose to take the opportunity on second reading to open the debate on this question. It is fairly generally accepted, under our parliamentary procedure, that debate implies an opportunity for the minister to reply to what has been said. The remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre might have been apropos had he uttered them while the hon. member for Peace River was speaking, but it seems to me that on the basis of reciprocity the minister should now be allowed to make his statement.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot agree with the position taken by the President of the Privy Council. The question was raised as a point of order and the minister had the opportunity, had he wished to take it, of speaking on the point of order. He did not participate in that discussion and the amendment was ruled out of order. The President of the Privy Council now suggests that the minister has the right to continue the discussion of the subject which was raised by way of a proposed amendment on the part of the hon. member for Peace River. I do not believe that would be the proper procedure.

I suggest to hon. members I was right in the first instance when I said he could not at this point engage in a discussion of the clauses of a bill. That is a basic rule of debate. When a motion for second reading is before the House we can debate in a general way the principle of the bill but not the clauses in detail. This is why I have some qualms about allowing a discussion at this stage on a particular aspect of the measure itself. I think it would have been better procedurally if there had been a debate, should one be required, on second reading, on the general principles, whatever they may be, followed by a detailed discussion of the particular clauses and schedules at another stage.

It is a little difficult to determine what might be said at this point if we are to limit ourselves entirely to the principle of the bill, which is a money bill. The point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is well taken. I agree fully with him. At the same time, if there is to be a general debate I would find it difficult to rule that hon. members cannot refer in any way to the details of the bill before us. So, perhaps the minister would endeavour to limit his remarks as much as possible to the question of principle. If he wishes to consider particular clauses in detail, that would better be done in due course when we are in committee.

Mr. Lang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly try to limit my observations to the general principle of the bill. As Your Honour has pointed out, a money bill has some peculiarities in that regard. So, while addressing myself to what is, no doubt, the most important part of the bill in many ways, I propose to refer to the general program involved in this one particular item.

This particular set of estimates contains provisions which are extremely important to the prairie farmers. I want to take this opportunity, in the presence of hon. members