

Interim Supply

legality of the manner in which these funds were obtained, he now says he will have to reconsider his position.

It has been a well known policy in parliament for a long time that legal opinions given to the government are confidential, but surely when they are set out by a minister they then become a matter of public information. The minister was questioned by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre concerning the legality of making these payments out of certain items in the estimates by transferring money from one item to another. The minister did not satisfactorily answer that question. He now says he will have to reconsider whether or not he can file the legal opinion. As I said earlier, if the government are not prepared now to bring out the facts and make public the legal opinion they obtained, then they have something to hide. I would say that what they are hiding is the fact that either they are guilty of fraud, guilty of illegality, or the Minister of National Revenue, who is Acting Minister of Finance, has misstated the facts.

• (8.10 p.m.)

The Liberal government has established a new precedent. The revision of the rules was to be a great reform. Members of our party, members of the New Democratic Party and members of the government party met to formulate new rules under which never again could a filibuster take place in reference to the estimates. The debate on the estimates including interim supply was to be limited to 30 days. This was to be a new and different era from 1962 and 1963 when members of this same government, then in opposition, used up 18 days to debate the estimates of the Department of Labour. These are the same people who are now complaining about delays. They accused this party of indecision when it was the government. When they got into power they formed a committee to bring about new rules. Many of us here realize that at times there is delay during debate. Many of us felt that these new rules would work. They were adopted on a trial basis. After the conduct of this government I must say that I am against the new rules, not because they are not good but because this government has abused them and has now established a new precedent.

The function of the opposition is a simple one. It is to examine and control the expenditures of the government.

Mr. Benson: Would the hon. member permit a question? I agree with him that the role of [Mr. Woolliams.]

the opposition is to examine the expenditures of the government, but would he explain to me how a debate on the national defence bill, which has been going on for the past ten days, has anything to do with an examination of the expenditures of the government?

Mr. Woolliams: I am glad the minister has asked that question because that is the subject of the next part of my speech. When this debate commenced the bill in question was not on the order paper. The minister knows as well as I that the committee which would examine this bill after second reading would be in a different position following approval in principle from what it would be if it examined the facts before second reading. Before second reading it would be in a position, as a result of hearing evidence from experts, to ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of unification and the justification therefor in Canada.

An hon. Member: Tell us why.

Mr. Woolliams: The answer to that question is obvious. If there is no difference, why does the minister not permit the defence committee to sit to hear the evidence of these experts, these people who have served this country well? They should be brought before the committee for examination. The Minister of National Defence refuses to allow that committee to sit.

An hon. Member: Oh, no.

Mr. Woolliams: Yes, he does.

An hon. Member: Oh, no.

Mr. Woolliams: This debate could be ended in one hour, six hours or one day if the Minister of National Defence would agree—

Mr. Benson: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member says we are not willing to have the facts examined. Under the normal processes of parliament a bill is given second reading, approval in principle, and often then sent to a committee which hears evidence for or against that principle. Such a committee can examine the facts in full, after which appropriate decisions can be made.

Mr. Woolliams: I am glad the minister interrupted because I am one member of parliament who believes that precedent establishes practice. Let us go back to the debates of 1963.

An hon. Member: What a change.