

Northwest Territories Act

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is it not a one-sided debate under our present practice? It is customary now for the minister to make a statement. After he makes his statement other members rise and express their views on the resolution. They ask questions with regard to the resolution. The minister has no opportunity to answer them. The minister has the right to speak once. He makes his statement and then he hears objections. The minister has no opportunity to answer objections, and under our present practice it is my opinion that the house cannot vote intelligently on the motion.

Mr. Knowles: On the point you have just raised may I suggest that, although you are correct in saying that the minister does not have the right to reply on this type of motion, other ministers or other members on the government side have the right to get into the debate and take part in it on the same side for which the minister spoke. May I also point out that in some of these debates the minister concerned may speak in support of the motion and those on the opposition side may also speak in support of it. Sometimes those in the opposition are more in favour of a government motion than those on the government side. In fact they may want something more than is in the motion.

All I am suggesting is that our position should be either that debate is allowed or is not allowed. If it is allowed then it should be open to members to speak according to their views on the question, whether they are for or against whatever is before the house. I would support Your Honour wholly in ruling that the debate must be relevant to the subject matter of the resolution on which we are to go into committee, but I do see considerable difficulty in a strict application of that phrase in Mr. Glen's ruling of February 23, 1942, when he said that the debate therefore must be directed to the negative of the motion. The hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) has pointed out, as you yourself said when the matter was discussed before, and it has been made clear by Mr. Glen and by all others who have studied the matter, that the question is debatable.

The only point at issue is as to the extent of the debate. My view is that Your Honour should not feel yourself bound by that phrase Mr. Glen used, namely speaking to the negative, but that Your Honour should take the view Your Honour took the last time, that the motion is debatable. You might also take the view that you are going to insist on debate being relevant to the question on which it is proposed that we go into committee of the whole. I for one will certainly support Your Honour in insisting on the law of relevancy being applied. I

would think it would be within that framework that you would resolve the problem you gave to us the other day as to the extent of debate which should be allowed.

As members know, Mr. Speaker, there is a good deal more that I could say, but there is no point in repeating what I said the other day. I will just add this. The Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) said on June 4 when speaking on this point of order that I surely was not serious in feeling unhappy about the fact that a ruling was being sought on this point at this juncture when the whole question of whether or not we should have debate at this stage is still under discussion by a special committee of this house on procedure. It may be that I did not make my position clear, but in what I said to the Prime Minister and to Your Honour I was quite serious. I feel that way in view of the fact that ever since Mr. Speaker Glen's ruling of ten years ago we have continued to have debate at this stage; in view of the fact the right to have that debate has been taken for granted; and in view of the fact that three committees have considered whether or not it should be abolished.

To me therefore it would be unfortunate if a situation were to develop in which that right might be taken away by a ruling made while the whole question is still being considered. I am quite satisfied that is one of the problems that will undoubtedly concern Your Honour in dealing with this; and Your Honour certainly will be of the view that the committee will still be in a position to consider whether or not we should have the debate at this stage.

I have already indicated that I would support Your Honour in applying the law of relevancy, but I would hope any ruling that would make any drastic change in procedure at this stage would not be given until the committee on procedure has had more time to deal with this important question.

Mr. Drew: I think there is one aspect of this discussion which may seem somewhat technical but which it seems to me should not be regarded in making a ruling in relation to the point which has been raised by the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker Glen made a ruling which in effect said that after the introduction of the matter by the minister who presents the motion there could be a debate, but that the debate must simply be from the negative point of view.

I do not think we are splitting hairs in a matter of this kind by pointing out that if a discussion is to be from only one point