

Privilege—Mr. Stevens

debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of any item of business relating to interim supply—

I find nothing wrong with that rule. The government can ask for interim supply, but surely they cannot ask for 100 per cent of the estimates. That rule has been read very often; maybe it is the only protection for the taxpayers. Standing Order 82(2) reads as follows:

In order to give effect to the purposes and provisions of section 3 of the Canadian Bill of Rights, it is the duty of the Clerk to cause to be delivered to the Minister of Justice two copies of every bill introduced in or presented to the House of Commons, forthwith after the introduction in or presentation to the House of such bill.

They must have had roller-skates on last night to have been able to run with that bill to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang), because it was put to the House two seconds before the debate was allowed. Mr. Speaker, I have never been more sincere in my life than I am now, and if you feel I have a proper question of privilege I ask you to consider a motion to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker: I also have notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens). It is not identical to the one just put forward by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) but it is on the same general subject. In the interest of orderliness it might be appropriate to ask the hon. member for York-Simcoe to develop his question of privilege.

MR. STEVENS—RIGHT OF MEMBERS TO VOTE SUPPLY AND SET CEILING ON GOVERNMENT BORROWINGS

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I also rise on a question of privilege which concerns the most important and fundamental privilege of members of the House. I refer to the exclusive right of hon. members to vote supply and to set a ceiling on the amounts that may be borrowed at any time by the government. On December 11 of the last year I rose on a question of privilege concerning the procedure then adopted which gave the government power to raise a further \$2.5 billion in loans. With respect, I would refer to what was said at that time, beginning at page 2143 of *Hansard*. At that time the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) stated:

—I want to make it clear that I am not defending the procedure that was followed. I hope we can avoid this sort of thing in future.

Subsequently, Your Honour stated:

I would only add that the comments of the President of the Privy Council must be taken, if not as a clear undertaking, at least as very close to an undertaking tantamount to the previous one that the hon. President of the Privy Council was good enough to give to the chamber, that is that the supply procedures would be examined by the procedure committee and furthermore the procedures contained in the actual supply bill, being as it is under a very severe guillotine with regard to amendment and debate, would also be taken under consideration by that committee and certainly that is something for which we would hope.

In last evening's debate there was a further \$4 billion in loans authorized by the passage of Bill C-55. Since 1967, total loans or liabilities of the Government of Canada have increased by \$24 billion, from a total of \$32 billion to \$56 billion, yet there has never been any comprehensive review of ceiling limits by any committee of this House;

[Mr. Woolliams.]

there has never been a debate on these ceiling limits. Instead, this procedure has been used repeatedly.

Last night I attempted to question the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) as to what is the actual, new ceiling limit as far as the lending or borrowing ability of the government is concerned, and I was denied the right to receive an answer to that question. With regard to last evening's debate, the confusion which arises from our current procedure is perhaps shown in the apparent conflict in the rulings of the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House. At one point in the questioning of the President of the Treasury Board the Chairman stated that at that stage of committee of the whole proceedings there was no debate and that the committee had to decide upon this. The Chairman indicated that hon. members could ask questions for information, but he did not want to have an exchange from one side of the House to the other. However, later when I rose and asked whether the President of the Treasury Board could indicate what sums remained unborrowed and negotiated in loans authorized by parliament, the Chairman ruled that the rules did not permit debate and that asking questions is debate. Subsequently, the Chairman indicated that I might have a procedural point of order concerning clause 5, but that I could not ask for information as far as the bill was concerned.

Mr. Speaker, this point was dealt with in part by Your Honour and Your Honour indicated that under this procedure the estimates, whether they be main or supplementary estimates such as is the case with respect to these two bills, are examined in the standing committees. Subsequently, Your Honour stated that the rapid passage of these bills in the evening must be predicated upon the previous opportunity of examining the spending estimates, which after all are the substance of debate either in standing committees or on the floor of the House.

The \$4 billion loan limit to which I have referred was not included in the estimates; it was not something that will ever come before any committee of this House. I point out that it is, surely, a most unsatisfactory procedure when we are asked to raise a lending ceiling by a further \$4 billion. We are not even made aware of the total ceiling which the government now has available to it with respect to lending activities, yet when questions were put on this subject last evening, because of procedural problems we were not given the privilege of obtaining that information.

If the Chair agrees that my question of privilege is well founded, I will move, seconded by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker):

● (1120)

That the subject matter of this question of privilege be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization to recommend a suitable procedure for the setting of ceilings by parliament on the amount that may be raised by loan by the government.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I begin these brief remarks on the question of privilege by reference to Standing Order 58(10) under which the procedure took place last evening. The relative section is in the middle of that subparagraph and reads as follows:

If the motion under consideration at the hour of interruption is a no-confidence motion, the Speaker first shall put forthwith, without