Income Tax Act

The House leaders could then meet and solve the problem, rather than getting into a procedural argument now. In my time in the House I have never seen anything like this, 100 amendments being proposed to a bill of 707 pages and the House asked to take an intelligent view of them this afternoon. It would turn this whole debate into a complete farce. If that is the kind of debate the Minister of Finance is entertaining, members on this side have a different view.

Mr. Benson: It might be difficult for the hon. member to take an intelligent view in any circumstances, Mr. Speaker. We have tabled these amendments at the request of the opposition, rather than introducing them one amendment at a time as we proceed through the bill. In order to facilitate matters, we have introduced them all at once. There was no compulsion to do this; we have done it in order to be co-operative, and now we are hearing complaints.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I do not rise to discuss the respective intelligence of the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), though I would be happy to do so at another time. However, I do not think this is the place to do it, and I hardly think it is the place for the Minister of Finance to do it either. He says he is doing this as a favour. Mr. Speaker, he has introduced a great number of amendments—

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Ninety-five.

Mr. Stanfield: —to a very complex bill, amendments which as far as we know have a significant bearing on the bill. Why does he insist on being—excuse the word—so bull-headed in proceeding with the matter this afternoon rather than giving members of the House an opportunity to examine the amendments he has in mind? We should have an opportunity to see if the amendments change the bill significantly, to see to what extent they are technical, as he says they are, and to what extent they are substantial, as I expect a number of them will turn out to be. If the minister wants to proceed, he has his troops on that side of the House and he can go ahead—if that is the way he wants to pass tax legislation in this country, Mr. Speaker.

An hon. Member: Arrogant.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I do not think we need upset ourselves too much. Obviously, for the balance of today everyone is prepared to deal with the tax bill and it would be inefficient and unsatisfactory at this juncture to switch to another item. It is my understanding that the first 17 pages of the bill are not affected by the amendments. If the traditional practice had been observed, of introducing amendments when the clause to be amended is reached, we would have proceeded today with the first 17 pages before any amendment was called. I suggest that perhaps it would be useful if we were to proceed at least through the first 17 pages before putting the amendments, and thus not waste our time.

• (3:40 p.m.)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. With reference to the suggestion of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), hon. members may recall that there was general agreement earlier that there would be what was described as a first round of debate with the House in committee of the whole. Such a suggestion was made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and I think it was generally agreed to by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) and by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert); then possibly for the remainder of the day a general discussion could proceed and in the interval the House leaders could meet and take up the question raised by hon. members. Is it the wish of hon. members that we proceed on that basis?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Baldwin: On division.

The House resumed consideration in committee of Bill C-259, to amend the Income Tax Act and to make certain provisions and alterations in the statute law related to or consequential upon the amendments to that act—Mr. Benson—Mr. Honey in the chair.

Mr. Nesbitt: Mr. Chairman, as the minister himself said a few moments ago, the whole of this tax bill is very complex and some of it is vague. The minister's remarks have been substantiated by tax lawyers and tax experts from one end of the country to the other. Most of these gentlemen who are learned in the subject have not yet found the answers to all the cross-references in the bill. One of the effects of this has been the continuation of uncertainty in the business community, an uncertainty which has led to lack of business expansion. Everybody is marking time because everybody wants to find out what some of the clauses of the bill mean. That may be made evident during the discussions at our committee stage. Until people find out what certain clauses mean, there will be a standstill in business expansion.

This afternoon the minister brought in 95 amendments and suggested that most of them are very technical. Perhaps they are. But he said that some of them are substantive, particularly those dealing with co-operatives and credit unions. Since there are more credit unions, per capita, in my constituency than in any other constituency in Canada, I, for one, no doubt along with many other hon. members on all sides of the House, am keenly interested in what will be the effects of such amendments.

I want to make a substantial part of my remarks this afternoon about credit unions and the originally proposed tax changes concerning credit unions. I am glad the minister has decided to make some changes for the better and I am sure that hon. members on all sides of the House will agree with me. The minister has come under quite a bit of pressure in this regard and he may have guessed that he would come under much more pressure in this House if he did not make changes with respect to the taxing of credit unions. However, we are still very much in the dark. I do not have a copy of the amendments and none of my colleagues, except the financial spokesman of our party, has a copy of them.

Although I carefully listened to the minister, and although the proposed changes may be helpful, I submit that before we can make really appropriate remarks about the changes they will have to be examined carefully by senior, experienced officials of the credit union move-