

Supply

Mr. Speaker, through clause 5, which was never discussed by any parliamentary committee, Parliament is asked to grant the government the authority to borrow \$2 billion; this will contribute to indebting Canadians further, under the absolute tutelage of the financial and banking system, without our having had the opportunity of discussing the clause. We oppose that clause, since it was never debated in committee. Never has this government asked permission from any parliamentary committee to borrow or be authorized to borrow the amount of \$2 billion. Nor does the government divulge the rate of interest it will have to pay on that amount. As the hon. members for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) pointed out, the government trespasses on the rights of Parliament by trying to impose upon us a financial and borrowing system that will indebt Canadians further, without considering the opinions of the elected representatives of the people. That is why we respectfully ask that this clause be declared out of order without reservation and, therefore, the whole bill.

[English]

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the intervention of the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). The hon. member for Edmonton West was here during the time when two of these bills were presented. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was in the House in March of this year when we presented a bill which contained exactly the same provision, and he raised no objection then. We are not contravening the constitution in what we are doing here. What we are trying to do is to obtain authorization for the following funds.

I agree that Standing Order 62 was passed pursuant to the British North America Act. Standing Order 62 reads:

This House shall not adopt or pass any vote, resolution, address or bill for the appropriation of any part of the public revenue, or any tax or impost to any purpose that has not been first recommended to the House—

We are not attempting to do that. We are seeking approval to obtain moneys by way of borrowing in the usual manner, as provided in the Financial Administration Act.

With reference to expenditure, it cannot be made without the approval of the House. There is no doubt about that. That is the role of the estimates we are presently studying. There cannot be expenditure without approval. However, under the Financial Administration Act there is power to seek funds in the usual way by borrowing on the open market in the manner provided by the statute. These funds are expended under the control of the House.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) dragged a red herring across this argument by bringing in Standing Order 58(19). It is true that Standing Order 58(19) provides that there has to be an order of the House in order to pass the estimates. There is no doubt about that, but the standing order does not prohibit this parliament from—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May I point out to all hon. members that I am taking this point of order, I say for the

[Mr. Fortin.]

third time, most seriously. In order to take it seriously I have to be able to hear the arguments on both sides.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blais: Standing Order 58(19) in no way prohibits the practice that has been adopted by the House and carried on since 1955. Undoubtedly the gentlemen who were sitting in Your Honour's position were made aware of the provisions as the bills were presented, and there is no doubt that the procedure presently followed by the government is in order. I suggest the reasoning of the Chair at that time was exactly that advanced to Your Honour, namely, that the government is attempting at this time through clause 5 of the bill to seek authority to borrow, not to expend funds. Funds can only be expended when the estimates are approved by this House.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to make one or two suggestions to Your Honour in connection with the point that has been raised. With regard to the historical argument, may I point out that very significant changes have been made to the whole supply procedure since the days referred to by the government House leader.

The most serious point I want to make to Your Honour is that I believe you should adopt in this case a very strict construction, because there are some very unusual rules under which the bill proceeds through the House. There is no provision for debate.

Mr. Sharp: Yes, in committee.

Mr. Stanfield: The minister has just made my point for me. He says there is debate in committee—debate on the estimates, examination of the estimates, yes, but absolutely no examination or possibility of debate on this clause. Therefore I content myself with saying that there is very clearly a heavy burden on the government to justify including any measure, whether it relates to borrowing or to divorce, in a bill that cannot be debated. I therefore suggest there would have to be very unusual reasons, which have not been put forward tonight by government spokesmen, for justifying the inclusion in a bill that cannot be debated any provision that was not included in the estimates.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I agree totally with the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) that you should apply a very strict construction to the words used in section 54 of the British North America Act and in the standing orders. As my colleague from Nipissing pointed out in his very able address, the words "appropriation," "estimates", and, in the case of section 54, the words "vote, resolution, address, or bill for the appropriation of any part of the public revenue" mean exactly that and no more.

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These supply procedures are in effect the authority to pay out of the consolidated revenue fund, or to make payments as provided in the estimates for this particular purpose. Section 54 is confined to payments out only. It does not apply to the borrowing authority exercised by the Government of Canada traditionally over the years.