

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

Mr. Crosbie: The point is that these members have been blocked out from this consideration. There is another vote tonight on a non-confidence motion of the government. The minister, who has been in this House longer than many of us, far too long for any good it is doing the people of Canada and who has adopted this technique, knows that it will boomerang. Rather than making this kind of a statement, if the minister is going to do more in the fiscal line, if he is going to indicate a different direction and that the deficit is not going to go up, that he is going to reduce the deficit, or that borrowing is not going to go up as it appears, surely to God he should have waited until he was ready with his whole package.

Now what he has done is shown that it does not matter. He is going to spend more. He is going to borrow more. That is his direction. That is his message to this country. That is his message to the investor. That is his message to the foreign investor. That is his message to the IMF. That is his message to the world. That is his message to the ordinary people of Canada—that he is going to be a spendthrift; that he does not care about what direction the United States is going or others. He is going to do the exact opposite to what everybody else who has studied this seriously thinks ought to be done.

If that is the role this government is now set on fiscally and financially, surely we should be having a six-day budget debate on this, not a two or three-speech debate, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of State for Finance.

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of State (Finance)): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would not want to delay unduly the proceedings of the House but I would like to make a few comments following the question of privilege that was raised.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) is in fact being blamed for following a procedure that is in accordance with the customs and rules of this House. That was very well explained under the rules and precedents that were quoted and recognized by one of our colleagues whose authority is respected when it comes to the rules and procedures of this House, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). The issue is clear to all members from a procedural point of view; the Minister of Finance proceeded according to the rules, customs and normal procedures as they are known to hon. members. However, he is being blamed for that.

What is the Minister of Finance also being blamed for, Madam Speaker? He is being blamed for taking the opportunity to inform hon. members and the people of Canada of certain measures that were already tabled in the House and the way he intends to proceed with respect to those measures and thus dispose of certain business that had been left in abeyance. Furthermore, he is being blamed for taking the opportunity to describe the situation with respect to the expenditures as they are forecast today and also give certain indications on the state of the economy. In fact, coming back to the first point, as was pointed out, the tabling of ways and means

motions was often used outside budgets, as the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) has done himself. He did so to table ways and means motions originating from the tabling of a budget, and in that instance, a new government.

His ways and means motion also included extremely important measures concerning either new revenues or tax reductions. The hon. member for St. John's West had also used a ways and means motion to put forward the mortgage interest tax credit program and property taxes on buildings. Everyone will recall that the revenues that were to be produced by this measure were very large. The hon. member had proceeded correctly by tabling a ways and means motion following the rules and traditions of this House.

We therefore see that the procedural argument is not valid since the procedure followed is in accordance with our rules and since there have been many precedents concerning the tabling of ways and means motions. Moreover, I said earlier, our colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre recognizes that the Minister of Finance has faithfully followed the procedure in this case.

As for the second argument, I believe that no one should criticize the government for having given too much information. Quite the opposite, the government is often blamed for giving out too little information to the House and the public. This opportunity of clarifying certain points was used by the Minister of Finance to let the members know the situation and I believe that it shows a will to keep Parliament and the public well informed. The Minister of Finance should be congratulated for having taken the first opportunity after the general election to give this information to the House and to all Canadians.

Madam Speaker, those are the few comments that I wanted to make.

● (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, we have heard several epithets used to describe the conduct of the minister in his presentation last night, some of which have been slippery, dishonest, fraudulent. I want to liken that conduct to a certain insect in Alice in Wonderland. When Alice was having a conversation with the caterpillar, Alice took objection to the misuse, distortion and abuse of words by the caterpillar in that conversation. She said to the caterpillar, "You cannot use words in that fashion". The caterpillar, like the minister, said, "When I use a word, it means precisely what I choose it to mean, nothing more or less".

That is the kind of verbosity which the minister is bombarding us with in this shabby, tawdry attempt to smuggle in by way of the throne speech debate what in effect is a full-blown mini-budget. He chides the opposition for not being aware of the precedents. He cites May.

An hon. Member: You deserve it.