

Financial Administration Act

On clause 6—*Payments urgently required.*

Mr. Bell (Carleton): As I indicated when we were discussing a previous clause, I have reservations with respect to clause 6 which I wish now to express. This clause deals with Governor Generals' warrants. It repeals a former section and re-enacts it substituting the President of the Treasury Board for the Minister of Finance.

Now I was brought up in the old school which believed that Governor Generals' warrants were evil in themselves and basically inconsistent with responsible government. I therefore intend to oppose the re-enactment of this provision. In my opinion it is an affront to parliament and to responsible government for any prime minister to seek dissolution of parliament without having secured from parliament financial provision for at least the election period.

The persistent use of Governor Generals' warrants in the past few years is a denial of the basic function of the House of Commons. Four times in 25 years parliament has been totally by-passed and ignored and the national administration financed over long periods through this undemocratic technique. In 1940 Mr. Mackenzie King persuaded Lord Tweedsmuir, improperly, in my view, to dissolve parliament at a time when no provision had been made for the public service until a new parliament might meet. As a result, there had to be massive resort to Governor Generals' warrants.

This precedent was followed in 1958 when Mr. Massey granted the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert a dissolution without consideration of the financial provisions still to be made, and resort was had to Governor Generals' warrants not only for that fiscal year but for the ensuing year. From that date things have gone from bad to worse. When the former government was defeated in this house in February 1963, no effort was made, despite some urging by ministers, to come back to the house the following day and ask for financial provision to tide the administration over until the new parliament could meet. So essential Canadian needs were financed by that government, and by the government which was elected on April 8, 1963, through Governor Generals' warrants, and this was done for many months.

Then, deliberately, in September, 1965, the present Prime Minister induced General Vanier to grant a dissolution without the House of Commons having made any financial provision whatever for the election period.

Once again resort was had to Governor Generals' warrants for a period of several months. Four times for extended periods on each occasion this house has been by-passed and ignored and I think this intolerable denial of the basic authority of the House of Commons is something which should be stopped.

I believe this provision ought not to be re-enacted and that the correct procedure before the dissolution of parliament at any time is for the government to come to the House of Commons and secure supply for the period that is likely to elapse before the next parliament meets. Until this is done, parliament ought not to be dissolved. I believe, as I say, that a Governor Generals' warrant is evil per se and on that ground I intend to oppose the re-enactment of this clause.

● (9:30 p.m.)

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Chairman, I can do nothing less than support as strongly as possible the very valid position taken by the hon. member for Carleton. During the time I had the honour to be chairman of the public accounts committee, and subsequently sitting as a member of the committee, this matter engaged our attention year after year after year. I think there can be no better way of bringing this matter to the attention of the committee and demonstrating the seriousness of the situation than by referring to paragraph 48 of the report of the Auditor General for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1966, which has just been delivered to me. This special problem is dealt with under paragraph 48, at page 17. The Auditor General refers to the dissolution of parliament on September 8, 1965, and says:

The dissolution of parliament on September 8, 1965 before full supply for the year 1965-66 had been granted, necessitated recourse to Governor General's special warrants to provide the funds for carrying on government services until the new parliament was assembled on January 18, 1966. A total of \$920,591,867 was provided by five special warrants as follows:

The Auditor General goes on to say:

When the 1965-66 special warrants were being prepared the departments were instructed by the Treasury Board that each vote and class of payments required special consideration in the light of section 28 of the Financial Administration Act.

That is of course, the act which is being repealed and re-enacted by clause 6 of this bill. This passage in the Auditor General's report continues:

The Treasury Board also advised the departments to review and take into account the particular audit comments contained in the Auditor General's reports for 1962-63 and 1963-64.