

Foreign Exchange Holdings

afternoon in the one hour available, not only shall we not have obtained the production of the figures asked for but that we shall have lost our opportunity to vote on the measure. In other words, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that under this procedure parliament would be worse off than previously because at least previously we had the right to force a vote on the production of a document.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: Closure.

Mr. Howard: Getting close to the truth.

Mr. Turner: If I might do so, Mr. Speaker, I should like to examine the reason and again I do this with deference because of my lack of experience in this house.

Mr. Speaker: I might just here interject a little word of caution. Ascribing motives to hon. members on either side of the house, of course, is not in keeping with the traditions of this house. All I am doing is just issuing a word of caution to the hon. member.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: So far I have not heard anything that would infringe.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: That is all I am saying. Hon. members may be objecting now but I would point out that on other occasions they have been extremely sensitive when motives have been attributed.

Mr. Turner: May I then examine what I interpret to be the reasons behind the rule for the motion for the production of papers. As I said, I do this with the deference of one in my position. It seems to me that parliament has been so constructed over the years, by way of its traditions and the history of the parliamentary system, that it has its checks and balances. It has checks and balances so that the opposition and the individual members of the house can challenge and scrutinize what the government is doing. There are two primary methods for scrutiny, it would seem to me. The first is the method of questions with which I will not deal; it has had your attention very directly, Mr. Speaker, in these past few days. There is also the method of the production of documents whereby figures in the sole hands of the government can be demanded by opposition members, subject to the ordinary rules of public policy and privilege. What I am saying is that the procedure adopted by the minister could conceivably nullify the purpose of rule 47 for the production of papers by having the debate prolonged to such an extent that no vote could be taken forcing their production.

[Mr. Turner.]

(Translation):

Mr. Speaker, I should like to point out to my French speaking colleagues in all parts of the house that the purpose of the question now being considered is not merely to secure production of figures necessary to the public but also to protect the rights of parliament itself and of every hon. member.

If the debate is protracted, we shall have neither the figures nor the right to put the question to a vote in order to determine whether the government should produce them. To deny the production of documents is one thing, but to deny the right to vote is still worse.

(Text):

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me just a minute or two minutes more, may I say this. In the alternative which the minister has chosen of opting for a debatable motion this afternoon he is entirely, I say with respect, within the rules of this house. However, if this option has the result of frustrating parliament not only by refusing production of figures but by prolonging debate beyond the time available for a vote, motions for production of documents will become a dead letter and the right of parliament to scrutinize and check the government will be infringed. I would therefore urge all members of this house to allow a vote to be taken this afternoon and to support the motion so that parliament and the public can obtain the facts with regard to our foreign exchange position prior to the date of the election and can make up their own minds as to who is right in the argument as to whether or not the government deceived the people.

Hon. George C. Nowlan (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, my first words, of course, should be ones of congratulation to the hon. member who has just made a very effective speech on a very poor subject. I believe that to some extent he could have saved some of his breath, as he will understand before I sit down. I am not going to comment on the new rule. Technically he was correct in what he said about it. However, I might say that some hon. members do not have to recall to their minds the fact that in 1956, under a rule which had the same effect of transferring a debate, when a certain opposition was trying to have a matter brought forward a certain minister of the crown of that day who is now sitting not too far away from me at the moment, had a similar motion carried into debate, with only this difference. Under the old rule, that motion could not come up again during the session and parliament was frustrated. Under this rule we did this yesterday knowing we would be debating it today. That, of course, is just the difference between the two.