

Business of the House

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I submit, Mr. Speaker, that since the opposition parties in this House represent, according to the vote of 1968, more than 50 per cent of the people in this country, more people than the members on the other side of the House represent, our desire that this bill be dealt with by free debate rather than under closure is a valid point. As a House leader I would be glad to continue taking part in discussions to try to achieve some understanding, some way, to bring the tax debate to an end. I submit that this is the wrong way, that it produces ill will and that it is unfair to foist upon the people of Canada, under closure, a tax bill of this magnitude. Therefore, Sir, I hope the House will vote against the motion that is now before it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the arguments brought forward by the government leader in support of his motion include three main points which I should like to analyze very objectively.

First of all, he referred to the white paper which was produced and which, for many months, has been available for public perusal. The public was in a position to make representations to enable the government to make changes called for by the organizations which were prepared to submit relevant briefs.

I readily recognize that the hon. minister is right in saying that the public had the opportunity to make an exhaustive study of the legislation. I would however point out to him that preliminary studies for preparation of Bill C-259 involved very lengthy work sessions for department officials over several years. And today the members who have been acquainted with this omnibus bill for only a few months are being asked to pass it in all haste.

I recognize that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) moved a motion in this connection on June 18th. But the bill itself was handed over to the members only in early September; it contains provisions and amendments of great importance to various organizations; representations are being made to us almost daily since the opening of the debate, and we must make sure that the individuals and organisations that are hardest hit will not be taxed unfairly.

The Croll report on poverty mentions that 60 per cent of federal taxes are paid by low wage earners. We must take the necessary steps to study tax reform in order to guarantee some categories of people the possibility of getting a more equitable treatment.

• (2:50 p.m.)

At the second reading stage, Creditistes were wrongly accused of filibustering a little when the House made the detailed study of sections 135, 136 and 137 of the bill regarding co-operatives and caisses populaires. But our only intention then was to make suggestions to the government, to propose ways of improving the tax system, while being very careful not to destroy the co-operative movement which served Canadians so well and is still able to do so.

The hon. minister informed us today that amendments would be brought forward with regard to capital employed.

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This is what we suggested in order to speed up the debate, namely that the proposed concept of capital used which would serve as the main basis for computing the cooperative corporations tax, be simply removed. If the Minister would introduce an amendment of such a nature in order to remove this concept, there would no longer be any discussion, and the section would be passed very quickly I do not see any reason why it was felt necessary to invoke Standing Order 75C to limit the debates, because as soon as the government moves these amendments that meet with the wishes of the caisses populaires, the co-operative corporations, the credit unions as well as our own, he can be assured of the co-operation of all the hon. members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, we are not here to make deals. I find it extremely unpleasant to see that when we want to speed up business, we try to make offers and counter-offers. I really do not like this business about making conditional concessions. Let us be honest with one another. Surely we can come to an agreement without having to sound as if we were making a deal at the taxpayers' expense. Let there be honest, concrete suggestions made, let valid amendments be proposed, and the government can be assured of our co-operation. I object to the false information handed out to the public to the effect that whenever we take a stand, we do so in order to filibuster. I would also like the press to be more objective so that the public might be better informed of what goes on in this House.

On behalf of my colleagues I oppose this motion aimed at limiting debate on Bill C-259 to four days. Next Wednesday, after these four days, at a quarter to six, it will no longer be possible to propose amendments nor to continue the debate. That amounts to gagging the House. No matter whether you agree or not, the majority decides.

Mr. Speaker, it is the first time that such action has been taken since I came to the House. I sincerely deplore that. Yesterday I thought there was still some possibility that this motion would not be introduced today. I still had some hope. Even today, at noon, I told a journalist who had asked me about it that I hoped that the debate would not get even more complicated by such a motion. But, having taken this decision, the government will also have to bear the consequences. I will have to vote against that measure, but let it be clear that I do not vote against the amendments that will be proposed in order to improve the situation of co-operatives and caisses populaires.

Furthermore, we had asked that construction and forest workers as well as of mechanics and railwaymen be taken into consideration so that their travelling expenses be deductible under the bill, thus affording them a measure of protection.

I regret very much, Mr. Speaker, that the front benches are so irresponsible because when we try to bring forth arguments likely to justify our position, they laugh and talk in order to confuse the speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell them that I am not thrown off the track that easily. I know where I am going I am sure of the positions I have to take and I do so honestly.

Finally, I must say that despite the government's attitude, we will co-operate just the same so as to make the best possible use of such a situation. Life must go on. Let us hope that we shall continue just the same to under-