

Business of the House

● (1622)

**ELECTRICITY INSPECTION ACT AND GAS
INSPECTION ACT****MEASURE TO AMEND**

Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-13, to amend the Electricity Inspection Act and the Gas Inspection Act.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

Mr. Speaker: Motions.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**AGREEMENT ON CONSIDERATION AND PASSAGE OF BILL C-7**

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a brief comment on the disposition of Bill C-7.

An hon. Member: Withdraw it.

Mr. MacEachen: Following the spirited, if illogically based, speech of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) in the debate yesterday, I received a communication from the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker). It is not a private letter because it was posted in the press gallery within 15 minutes of its arrival at my office, so I trust I will not be breaking any tradition of confidentiality by quoting—

Mr. Clark: That is known as open government.

Mr. MacEachen:—the third paragraph which may lay a foundation for the later discussions I had with party representatives and for the proposal which I trust will be agreed to as expediting the business of the House.

The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton wrote as follows:

Following upon the leader's presentation, I am writing formally to request that you agree to withdraw Bill C-7 and to bring in a new bill in place of Bill C-7, limited in its scope to a borrowing authority for the fiscal year 78-79 as set forth in Bill C-7.

In return, we are prepared to permit the introduction of this bill later today, or tomorrow if necessary, for first reading, to give second reading to such a new bill without debate immediately after its introduction and to refer it to a committee where it will be given speedy consideration.

I draw attention especially to the final paragraph because it is the one that attracted me particularly. It reads as follows:

We make this suggestion to you as a way to expedite the business of the House and the committee in which we have a mutual interest and I hope that it will meet with your favourable consideration.

I was very pleased to receive this letter and I communicated to my colleague that I would give it consideration and be in touch with him as soon as possible. I have had discussions with the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and the representative of the Social Credit party.

[Mr. Chrétien.]

I believe there is general agreement to my proposal that second reading of this bill will be concluded without further debate and that the bill will be amended in the standing committee to confine its application to the current fiscal year. It is not necessary to withdraw the bill. We can achieve the objective of confining the operation of the bill to the current fiscal year by particular amendments to it. We are agreeable to doing that, on the understanding that the committee will report not later than November 10, and that it will have no fewer than three meetings in that period, and that report stage and third reading will be completed in a period of not more than five hours.

I should add that I am quite agreeable that we have discussions to determine a mutually agreed upon time for votes that might occur as a result of the proceedings at report stage and third reading.

I suggest that, if this proposal is accepted, we might have the division on second reading today at 5.45 p.m. in order to ensure that those members of the House who have attended the funeral of our former colleague, the hon. Mr. Greene, will be present for the vote.

I hope this is a faithful representation of the discussions and, if it is agreeable to hon. members, it could be made a House order.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment briefly on the proposal put forward by the government House leader. First of all I should point out that the suggestion made by my leader yesterday, and subsequently transmitted to the government House leader by our House leader in a letter, underlined the fact that one part of the bill causes us particular concern, that is, what has been termed the "blank cheque" provision of \$10 billion for future spending.

My leader pointed out very strenuously, as have the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) and others, that we still have some substantial and valid objections to the remaining provisions in the bill with respect to the \$7 billion. It was on this basis that we had the discussions.

It was part of my understanding that the government House leader indicated he would ensure the attendance of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) at the standing committee so that he could be questioned. The government House leader is quite right in saying it was understood there would be no fewer than three sittings. I should make it quite clear that we came to this agreement on the basis that government members will not indulge themselves in points of order, questions of privilege, or other procedural tactics which are irrelevant, and that members will be able to question and cross-examine the Minister of Finance during the standing committee deliberations. I think it is fundamental to this understanding that we have a clear and unequivocal undertaking with respect to our right and ability to question the minister on the remaining provisions of the bill which are fundamental and very important to us.

The Minister of Finance is in the House, so perhaps he could give us an undertaking that he will be present at those