

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 2, 1985-86

SECOND READING

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Doody, seconded by the Honourable Senator Phillips, for the second reading of the Bill C-54, intituled: "An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the Government of Canada for the financial year ending the 31st March, 1986". —(*Honourable Senator Stewart (Antigonish-Guysborough)*).

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, Bill C-54 would authorize the Government of Canada to expend the balance of the money requested in the main estimates. It would also authorize the Government of Canada to expend the money it requested in supplementary estimates (A). The fact that authorization is sought in this one bill for these two sets of estimates confronts us with something of a problem.

Second reading of the bill was moved on Monday, June 17. The following day, June 18, the Deputy Leader of the Government told us that the Treasury dogs were barking at his heels. He said, relative to the planning of the program of the week of the Senate:

If we do not get the appropriation bill through before the end of this week, then they will have to go to extreme lengths to get funding for various matters of concern for the Government of Canada, namely, the payment of their ongoing expenses. Therefore, it is a matter of practical necessity that we get the appropriation bill through this week before we adjourn.

When I heard that I wondered what the great urgency was. The main appropriation bill normally does not come to this place until the dying moments of the month of June; yet, here we have second reading of the bill being moved on June 17, and we have been told that unless it receives Royal Assent before the end of the week Treasury Board will have to take drastic action—and will have to seek warrants, we were told this afternoon—as a means of dealing with their dire financial plight. There must be some explanation for this deviation from the normal pattern. That is why I asked earlier today for the government to explain why this bill is needed so urgently when normally the main appropriation bill is not required before the end of June. I hope that the Leader of the Government or his deputy will explain that for us before the bill passes.

Over the years I have watched the financial officers in their relations with Parliament. I was reminded of past thoughts on this subject last winter when the Senate was confronted with Bill C-11. The Department of Finance seems to think that Parliament is a body which has to adjust to the expediency of the Department of Finance. After all, they are the top civil servants in this country—the super-bureaucrats—and ministers are brought in to serve their purposes for a while. Ministers come and ministers go, but the top bureaucrats in the Department of Finance, at least some of them, go on forever. Members of Parliament come and they go, but senators,

unfortunately, stay a little while longer. But our feathers are to be plucked, we are told.

I am reminded of what happened in 1971 when the Minister of Finance of that day was proposing a new Income Tax Act. Without regard to all the advice that they received from the staff of the House of Commons, they brought in a notice of ways and means motion which was virtually in the form of the bill that they intended to put on the statute books. As many honourable senators know, that means that the hands of the Minister of Finance were tied insofar as the wording of the bill was concerned. The bill had to be consistent with his notice of ways and means motion. That motion produced by the Department of Finance was so specific that the minister found it very difficult to bring in a bill that was acceptable to members of the House of Commons, or even to those within his own party.

Then last February we had the example of Bill C-11 where the business to be done should have been dealt with in two bills. Now we are told that there were financial consequences that flowed from proceeding as they did; yet stubbornly, they insisted on going ahead regardless of the rights of Parliament.

Now we have yet another example. I do not claim that this is a major example, but it is an instance of the same kind of approach. We have one bill where we should have two. We should have one bill dealing with the balance of the main estimates and we should have a separate bill dealing with the money based on supplementary estimates (A). I do not argue that it is improper to put these two matters together, but it is improper to put them together and then insist that that part of the bill that is based on the main estimates has to be passed and receive Royal Assent with the same speed and urgency that seems to attend that part of the bill that is based on supplementary estimates (A). That is my complaint.

• (1530)

Perhaps Senator Doody is going to rise in his place and say, "No, no, it is not as obvious as that. What you say, of course, is true, but there is a much deeper reason and a greater kind of urgency here that you do not even suspect." I am hoping he will make some kind of interesting revelation along those lines.

We are being urged to give second reading now and third reading quickly to Bill C-54. As I said, second reading was moved the day before yesterday. Nowadays the Senate is going to be put right. The new, straitened régime has been revealed from on high. Thirty days is the appropriate amount of time for a money bill in the Senate. Nevertheless, in this case, this unreformed body is being asked to pass this bill in one week, that is, in about four days. I cannot resist asking myself: What kind of frenzy would the Minister of Justice find himself in if, in fact, we were to take the 30 days, the period which he finds appropriate for debating money bills?

Senator MacEachen: That's an idea.

Senator Frith: Has that ever occurred to you?

Senator Doody: I have been awake every night this week. You have no idea how much I worry about John's frenzy.