

Allotment of Time for Bill C-11

the extent that capital gains are not being indexed in order to allow for inflation.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that we reviewed the tax for employment benefits that is proposed. We suggested it was not what was needed. We felt there should be a greater exemption given with regard to the employment expense deductions that are in the Income Tax Act. Unhappily for the workers of Canada, the government ramrodded it through and said the allowance it was proposing was sufficient; that it would not go along with anything higher. Surely it is not wrong for us in this House to ask for a little better treatment. The provision to which I am referring simply allows the expense allowance to be raised from \$150 to \$250. We voted for it to go to \$400 on the basis that many people in business are able to get almost unlimited expense allowance simply by showing receipts. Surely it is not unreasonable to suggest that employees should get a bigger allowance than \$250.

We also dealt with the question of the proposal to tax the grants that will go to those who attempt to insulate their homes in order to save energy. We feel the government should not be taxing those grants. We made some effective arguments to back up that position. It was on this point that the Minister of Finance really lost his head. We pointed out—and we will be arguing this further—that the income tax motion with regard to the taxation of insulation grants is not in keeping with the legislation they are trying to foist through by means of this bill. If the bill in its present form passes, the government in future will be able to proscribe, as they say, any program and from this day on such programs will be subject to taxation. We say that provision is wrong, and we wish to have it deleted from the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the unfairness of this motion must be very obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to discover that there are 116 clauses in the bill and thus far we have dealt with only six of them. That means the other 110 clauses will have to be dealt with in what amounts to about 2½ days, since Wednesday is only a half day. In addition, we have the various amendments of which the government has already given us notice, plus other amendments which we understand are to be made. Therefore, I say it is very unfair to the House and the country to ask that this legislation be put through committee of the whole stage under a closure motion of this kind.

I enter the debate on this closure motion mainly to express, again, my disappointment at the ease with which the government brings in these motions. After all, every time the government uses a closure motion to end debate, it is coping out on its responsibility to participate in some significant discussion on the procedures of this House. I want to say frankly and categorically, I do not believe it is the right of the opposition to be able to decide that debate is going to go on forever.

Mr. Cafik: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Stevens.]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I am glad to have that "Hear, hear". I hope there will be a similar "Hear, hear" when I state the other side. I do not think the opposition should be able to engage in filibuster after filibuster and stall the work of the House in that way. However, the other side of the coin is there as well. I do not think it is fair for the government to be free to decide unilaterally, by its own fiat, that a debate must end whenever it says so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Surely there is somewhere a compromise, somewhere an accommodation between unlimited debate or filibuster on the one hand and the constant use of the guillotine on the other. What I do not like is that the government, having got 75C on the books, finds it easier to use that than the old Tory closure rule of 1913, and resorts to it time and time again as the easy way out. Some day we are going to have to come to an arrangement to handle the business of the House on the basis of common sense.

On a radio program yesterday, I think it was "Cross Country Check-up," I heard the voice of my good friend, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras). He made a remark to the effect that this House of Commons will have to be yanked into the twentieth century. I think the government has to face its responsibility in matters of procedure, as well.

● (1612)

In my opinion, a better way should be found. I will take a few minutes in which to lay out a proposal I have made a number of times because I feel it has common sense in its favour. I do not think every motion or every bill which comes before the House should be debated without any time limit. On the other hand, I do not think the government should have the right to cut off debate unilaterally.

We ought to have an arrangement based upon an understanding between both sides under which at the start of a session of parliament the government would be required to list all the measures it proposes to bring down during the session. The government, having provided such a list, a meeting should take place among the representatives of the parties to divide those bills into three categories. It should be possible to agree that a number of those measures are purely housekeeping in nature and ought to take very little time by way of discussion in this House or, perhaps, no time at all.

I have seen many bills debated at length on second reading when they could have gone to committee without any debate at all. At the other end of the scale, there are measures which are so important that the opposition ought to have the right to debate them at any length it wishes. In between are the routine bills which, I suggest, could be dealt with under some firm rule. So there are the three divisions: housekeeping measures which could go through with little or no discussion, routine bills which could be subject to a two-day limit, and then the controversial matters which would be open to full debate without time limit.