

Income Tax Act

At the same time, at the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, some of his colleagues accused the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) of wanting to sign with Quebec an agreement which would balkanize the country. Mr. Speaker, members of the opposition should stop saying one thing in Quebec and something else everywhere else in Canada. Mr. Speaker, since this bill will not penalize financially the people of Quebec and since the Minister of Finance has shown his good will by offering Quebec a tax rebate of \$100 for 1978, I shall support this bill when the vote is taken at the conclusion of the debate on second reading.

● (1602)

[English]

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to enter this debate until I listened to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) speak earlier this afternoon. I participate in the debate mainly in response to the suggestion of Mr. Speaker that this debate might be an appropriate place to make the response that I wish to make to the Minister of Transport.

With regard to the bill itself, I think the position of my party has been very well put and very well stated. We have been asked—indeed compelled—to vote today. I do not know whether the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) has time enough to come in and hear my remarks or not. We are being asked today to vote on a bill, the terms of which we do not know. It is as simple as that. The Minister of Finance speaks of being flexible, which is another way of saying that the bill, in its most important aspect as far as this House is concerned, may be very significantly changed in committee.

I never expected to sit in this House and be required to vote on closure on a bill, the terms of which I do not know. I think it is most extraordinary. If the roles were reversed and my hon. friends opposite by some strange coincidence found themselves in opposition, I can just imagine what a howl they would put up if they were confronted with a closure motion to vote on a bill, the terms of which are not in the bill itself. They are not even in the head of the Minister of Finance. I take it the Minister of Finance has some things in his head, but that is not one of them.

It is most extraordinary. I do not wish to use excessive language, but surely what is being asked of the House of Commons today is an affront to the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Chrétien: I presume you do not know what I will do.

An hon. Member: You do not know either.

Mr. Stanfield: I agree; I do not know what the minister will do. I agree that he does not know—

Mr. Chrétien: I think you do not.

Mr. Stanfield: If the minister does know, that makes the affront even more offensive. There is a double affront to this

[Mr. Duclos.]

House. The minister sits there grinning. He thinks he has the troops and I am sure he has got the troops.

Mr. Prud'homme: Wait until we read you this letter.

Mr. Boulanger: You are filibustering.

Mr. Stanfield: If the hon. member wishes to speak he will have his opportunity. I am not going to speak for very long.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) has the floor.

Mr. Stanfield: I think the hon. member who is interrupting me is fundamentally a good natured man but he finds himself in a tight position on this bill and his usual good nature is giving way under the difficulties in which he finds himself.

Mr. Boulanger: I am surprised that you follow Joe Clark in this manner.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, some people can speak better from the seat of their trousers than on their feet. It is an old gag to be rude to a member when he is speaking, but the hon. gentleman does not really bother me. This is a further indication of the extent to which supporters of the government are bothered by the situation in which they find themselves.

I say it is an affront for the minister to introduce closure to compel the House to vote on a bill, the terms of which are not clear to the House. Furthermore, we are being asked to vote on a bill which does not conform with the ways and means motion. We are being compelled, through closure, to vote on a bill which does not comply with the ways and means motion.

The minister finds himself in a difficult position. He tells the House—and I believe him—that he thought he was doing something useful for the country; he thought a reduction in sales tax was a useful thing to do at the present time and he set up to confront the provinces and get their agreement.

The difficulty is that he did not get the agreement of all the provinces. My hon. friends opposite can criticize the government of Quebec as much as they like and say it is regrettable that the government of Quebec was not prepared to go along with the Government of Canada and the rest of the country. The fact remains, however, that there is nothing in the constitution that requires the government of Quebec to go along with the Minister of Finance or the other provinces. There is nothing in our constitution nor in the spirit of our constitution which gives any of us the right to criticize the government of Quebec for refusing to go along with the proposal.

I hope the Minister of Finance will work this out eventually. I hope he is able to reach an accommodation with the government of Quebec. I say in all sincerity that there is no justification for introducing closure on a bill to bring about a sales tax reduction in the province of Quebec and across the country without the consent and approval of the provinces. In other words, I say in all sincerity that I understand the minister being worked up and feeling badly about the situation he is in.