

Senator MacDonald: Listening to my colleagues, Senators Murray and Phillips, this afternoon I also had the chilling feeling—having checked the order of precedence of the swearing-in—that my colleague, Senator Barootes might, in years to come, be pickled and put on display at the Museum of Man as “The Last Senator.” That thought brings me no joy.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank honourable senators for the warmth of their welcome, their greetings and the many courtesies which have been extended to me. I have the happy privilege of knowing about 40 per cent of the members of this chamber, which makes the task of my becoming acquainted a little easier. I will not single out those who greeted me so warmly except for one, and that is, of course, the distinguished Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator MacEachen. He was kind enough, when welcoming me, to make some very generous remarks, and I would simply reciprocate those sentiments.

Senator MacEachen and I go back a long period of time. We were classmates. Over the period of years I have known him, I have regarded him as a credit to his native province, to his native county, to his alma mater, and to the Parliament of Canada. I regard him as probably one of the ablest parliamentarians Nova Scotia and Canada have ever produced.

Without intending to simplify this matter, I suppose the question which may divide us is whether the length of time we have taken to study this matter has been either reasonable or necessary. As I think back over the last month, I find myself wondering if there was at any particular time, an opportunity—as they say in matters involving motor vehicle cases—to avoid the last chance for an accident.

Senator Sinclair refers to matters involving compromise. I think the offer Senator MacEachen made, when he suggested accepting \$7 billion now and leaving the \$12 billion until later, was a splendid idea. It would have solved the problem, and I was pleased to hear that offer. Unfortunately, we were in no position to accept it. That option was closed out. It was made abundantly clear by the minister, the deputy minister and the House of Commons that they regarded the entire bill as constituting an interim borrowing measure so, for reasons best known to themselves, it could not be returned. The dog was back in our laps.

Where, then, did the opportunity come to avoid what appears to have been an unprecedented time span? Considering the nature of the temperament of members of this chamber, where would students of conflict have seen an opportunity for some kind of deal, some way to resolve this matter? Would Barbara Tuchman have been able to find some material for a book, which would have resolved this matter? Has this been a charade, or is this an experience for me to which I will have to become accustomed in the next 13 years?

When I use the term “accident,” I use it in the sense that this borrowing bill has created an increasing amount of public attention with an accompanying amount of misunderstanding. I really cannot conceive of this reflecting any credit on this chamber.

[Senator Gigantès.]

Honourable senators have clung, with scholarship and I have to say some tedium, to their constitutional right to insist that a borrowing authority be preceded by something other than that which was presented on November 8. They have discarded that as a responsible forecast; they have considered that the precedents are irrelevant; and they have been impervious to the suggestion that this is but an interim borrowing measure with the assurance from the House of Commons and the minister that the balance of the expenditures will be outlined following a budget. I should have thought that would have been enough, but apparently it was not. That which is wanted now is the estimates. That has always been wanted. Not even the silken persuasive arguments of Senator Phillips could convince the senators opposite otherwise.

Senator Perrault: Synthetic silk.

Senator MacDonald: I should have thought those three things would have been enough: the November statement; the compelling precedents of other borrowing bills; and what appears to be the evidence of the delays costing taxpayers money.

I should have thought a compromise might have been—and I quote a right honourable distinguished Canadian—for us to “hold our noses and pass it,” and to be encouraged by the remarks of the Minister of Finance to accompany the passage of this bill with our views as to why this should not happen again. I thought we might be unanimous in that regard, but apparently that is not to be the case.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate has made it clear that his colleagues do not intend to defeat the bill, to amend it, or to send it back, now that that option has been closed. He tells us that, once they see the estimates, they will pass it. It is very clear that there was a guarantee in his statement, which resembled that which a Customs inspector might make—“We will let you into the country; we will look inside your bags; but we do not want to inspect them.”

Senator Sinclair suggests that the presentation of the estimates is a matter of “good business practice.” Does the presentation of estimates, which you consider to be *pro forma*, constitute sufficient grounds upon which to defend the principle of good business practice? You must fight on some grounds. What are they? Tell us where it is. Last night I watched with great interest the televised discussion between the Minister of Finance and the Honourable Senator Sinclair. I found it fascinating. Without suggesting anything with respect to the outcome of that matter, I was fascinated to note that when Senator Sinclair started to make his point and to get into the discussion, he was repeatedly interrupted by Barbara Frum who said, “But you are appointed.” That is the expression she used on more than one occasion to interrupt the honourable senator. She should not have done that with heaven knows how many hundreds of thousands of people watching.

● (1750)

Senator Sinclair: Would the honourable senator permit a question?