

Statement by Finance Minister

proposals. The minister's hope is that the house leaders will agree that since we are in committee of ways and means, we will just stay there and deal with the measures that he places before us.

The Solicitor General just now said he thought this motion was out of order because the Minister of Finance had already announced that there would be an opportunity to debate the measure. I suggest the Minister of Finance has made it very clear that he does not want the House of Commons, with Mr. Speaker in the chair, to have a chance to discuss this matter at all. That being the case, it seems to me we are entitled to have this discussion today.

I agree with those who have stressed the urgency of the matter because of the unsettling effect of this announcement, and all that; but I add one other point. Indeed, I said there were just two points that I wanted to make. I gather that the Minister of Finance, when he meets with the finance ministers of the provinces, is not going to sit there like a bump on a log; he is going to tell them something. I suggest that the first responsibility of a minister is to parliament, and he should be telling us before he tells the provinces.

For these two reasons, because we have not been guaranteed a debate at all on this measure with the Speaker in the chair and because we have the right as parliament to have information on this matter from the Minister of Finance before he meets with the provinces, we ought to have this debate today.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if it is the wish of hon. members that we have further contributions to the debate. It is not my intention to cut off hon. members, but I see four or five members have indicated their intention of taking part in this procedural debate and I doubt whether new arguments can be advanced. But again, I do not wish to place myself in the position where it can be suggested that I have cut off debate unduly.

Mr. Hees: I will take just about one minute, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Lapointe.

[Mr. Knowles.]

• (12 noon)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Grégoire (Lapointe): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to put forward two arguments in support of the urgency of the debate.

The hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) himself saw fit to mention that the right hon. Prime Minister has asked his ministers to remain in Ottawa for the week-end on account of the announcement which the minister has just made. If the right hon. Prime Minister thinks it urgent and necessary to ask all the ministers to remain here all week-end, Mr. Speaker, the situation must be serious indeed. The whole matter must be extremely urgent, and the financial situation in the country must be exceedingly precarious if 22 ministers are ordered to remain in Ottawa on account of that statement.

Thus, the urgency of dealing with the economic and financial situation in Canada is made evident by the fact that, as in wartime or during very extreme and momentous circumstances, the whole cabinet is ordered to remain in Ottawa. The Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister themselves have indicated the urgency of the matter; if the situation is that critical, it is just as urgent that parliament should know what is in store.

I, for one, should like to know before the week-end what disasters await us, since all the ministers have to remain in Ottawa during the week-end. What is going to happen?

You can imagine the rumours that will spread around the country, when it is known that the cabinet will stay here to consider a very serious situation, of which parliament has no inkling. This adds to the urgency of the debate today. If not, all the ministers would not be ordered to stay here, like a war-time cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, you realize that the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister themselves have stressed the urgency and the seriousness of the problem. What can be expected during the week-end? The cabinet will sit all through the week-end. Why? Because the situation is serious and disastrous; what cataclysm is in store for us? As you can see, Mr. Speaker, a debate is urgent, because the cabinet itself recognizes it, since all the ministers have to stay here.

The second point I wanted to make is that never before in our history has a Minister of Finance taken pleasure in allowing the anxiety caused by tax increases to persist.