

result in increased taxes or in decreased taxes on the general public, their constituents. How can Members make a decision on a question which is not clear? Surely that is fundamental to this place. Members of Parliament must know what they are voting on before they can decide how they will vote. On a fundamental issue such as taxation, the importance of this question is heightened even further.

● (1200)

If the motion is unclear, how should I vote? How can I explain my vote to those who elected me? Am I to tell them that I may have inadvertently voted in favour of a motion to concur in a Bill that would increase their taxes because I did not understand the motion? How can we prevent this situation from occurring if we are not clear on whether or not the Ways and Means motion will result in increased or decreased charges to our constituents?

In an attempt to help resolve this question in my own mind with respect to the motion in question, I consulted with the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon), and other staff members, about the wording of the motion. It has become clear that those five paragraphs, which you indicated earlier were unclear, become somewhat less confusing after referring to the free trade agreement. However, there still remains some doubt as to whether or not these paragraphs are relieving measures or will result in additional charges to the taxpayer. Therefore, I, as a Member of the House, am left with questions in my mind about the question I am being asked to decide upon. I think you would agree that this is a very confusing situation at the very least.

In recent years the Government has initiated Ways and Means motions, specifically those that arise out of budget legislation, which are detailed and specific. It is quite clear to the House just what we are being asked to vote upon. However, this five-paragraph motion tabled yesterday gives Members no such guidance whatsoever. It is totally incomplete.

I still maintain that if this motion is based upon the contents of the free trade agreement, it can contain no measures that increase the charge on taxpayers and thus is totally unnecessary as a preliminary step to the introduction of the free trade legislation. As such, and as I stated earlier, it limits the ability of Members of the House to amend the legislation that will eventually follow.

However, if you are of the opinion that these arguments are not convincing, then I submit, as I argued this morning, that the Ways and Means motion proposed by the Minister should be ruled out of order because it is, as you have stated yourself, unclear and therefore I as a Member of this House cannot be expected to decide on a question that is unclear.

I hope you will reflect on my arguments and perhaps return at a later time to make a ruling. I thank you for your patience in hearing my arguments at this moment.

Point of Order—Mr. Riis

Mr. Speaker: I have listened very carefully to the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) both yesterday and today. I indicated yesterday that whatever may be the final outcome, it seems to me that it was premature for the Chair to make a ruling. I have had time to reflect on the matter brought to my attention yesterday, and I have listened very carefully to the Hon. Member's complete argument again today. However, I remain of the same view. It is inappropriate for the Chair to try to make a ruling until the Chair sees what is actually in the proposed Bill. This does not mean that at that time it might not be appropriate to make a ruling.

I would add as a caveat that even if a ruling were made in accordance with the suggestion of the Hon. Member, it might not change anything very much. It might indicate that the Government had gone through an unnecessary process but it might not have any real substantive effect upon proceedings in the House.

I would ask the Hon. Member, who has raised a matter of importance, and certainly one of ingenuity, to accept the Chair's decision at this point that it would be premature to make an order. That does not mean I may not have further observations to make on the matter.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, my comments are not intended to reflect in any way on what you just said, but I wish to raise with Your Honour the question of whether the Ways and Means motion is sufficiently complete in itself and sufficiently understandable that Members can make a decision upon it through their vote. There are problems with the motion in so far as it is not clear exactly what it is intended to do and say.

It is not enough for the Government to say it will introduce a Bill as a result of this motion being passed, if it is, and then everything will become clear. Surely it must be necessary for the Government, if it wishes to have a Ways and Means motion properly before the House, to have the content of the motion drafted so that it is clear to anyone voting upon it exactly what it intends to accomplish with respect to changes in the fiscal measures in question.

I respectfully submit that this is not the case and therefore the motion is defective and cannot be put before the House in its present form because Members are not in a position, from looking at the motion alone and not at a whole range of extraneous matters, to know just what they are voting upon.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, on the point raised by the House Leader of the Official Opposition, I want to refer to Beauchesne's Fifth Edition which says, in Citation 237, that a point of order against procedure must be raised promptly, which has been done, and before the question has passed to a stage at which the objection would be out of place. The point we are trying to make is that at some point in the future, if your ruling were that we ought to proceed, it might be out of place or beyond the point where such an intervention would be appropriate.