

Government Orders

will refer to the famous ruling by Mr. Lamoureux of January 26, 1971 in which he said:

However, where do we stop? Where is the point of no return? The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and I believe the hon. member for Edmonton West, said that we might reach a point where we would have only one bill, a bill at the start of the session for the improvement of the quality of the life in Canada which would include every single proposed piece of legislation for the session. That would be an omnibus bill with a capital *O* and a capital *B*. But would it be acceptable legislation? There must be a point where we can go beyond what is acceptable from a strictly parliamentary standpoint.

Even though the Speaker in that case went on to rule that this point had not been reached, I submit to you that it has become a standard practice with governments to bring in omnibus legislation following every budget under what we might call the kitchen sink approach.

Beauchesne's sixth edition, citation 626 bears directly on this aspect of the matter. It states:

(1) Although there is no specific set of rules or guidelines governing the content of a bill, there should be a theme of relevancy amongst the contents of a bill. They must be relevant to and subject to the umbrella which is raised by the terminology of the long title of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

In this present case, the drafters of Bill C-17 have incorporated in the same bill the following measures: public sector compensation freezes; a freeze in Canada assistance plan payments and Public Utilities Income Tax Transfer Act transfers; extension and deepening of transportation subsidies; authorization for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to borrow money; and changes to unemployment insurance with respect to benefits and the payroll taxes.

First, there is a lack of relevancy of these issues. The omnibus bills we have before us attempt to amend several different existing laws.

Second, in the interest of democracy I ask: How can members represent their constituents on these various areas when they are forced to vote in a block on such legislation and on such concerns?

We can agree with some of the measures but oppose others. How do we express our views and the views of our constituents when the matters are so diverse? Dividing the bill into several components would allow members to represent views of their constituents on each of the different components in the bill.

The bill contains many distinct proposals and principles and asking members to provide simple answers to such complex questions is in contradiction to the conventions and practices of the House.

• (1010)

As well this will cause fairly serious difficulties in committee. This bill will ultimately go to only one committee of the House, a committee that will inevitably lack the breadth of expertise required for consideration of a bill of this scope. Furthermore, the workload of that committee will be onerous and it will be very difficult to give due consideration to all relevant opinion.

In concluding my point of order, I would like to quote the hon. member for Windsor West, the government House leader who said on May 30, 1988: "For all the reasons I have given, I respectfully submit that this bill is of improper omnibus nature. This is consistent with what I consider and I respectfully submit to be, the relevant precedents. This is consistent with the traditions of the House and, more important, the purpose of those traditions in terms of the relevance of this House to the life of the country now and in the future".

This is a new Parliament. I do ask that we take a new approach to this in spite of previous rulings on this matter. I would ask that you give consideration to this, Mr. Speaker. I would also ask the government members, particularly those who have spoken on precisely this question in the previous Parliament with precisely the same concerns, to give serious consideration to this issue of democracy and the functionality of this Parliament now.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member has raised this point today in the House. The bill has been before the House for a period of time. I am surprised that if he had objections to the format of the bill he would not have raised them in a procedural way before.

However having done so, it is only fair for the hon. member to bear in mind this is not a particularly onerous bill in terms of the material contained in it. It is actually quite short. It is only 21 pages and by any standard in this House it is not a thick bill. There are ones with many more pages which have been introduced in this session already.

I also note that all the provisions in this bill are ones that arose out of the budget presented by the Minister of Finance a month ago. As such they were debated in the House for four days in the course of the budget debate. All the issues were discussed during those four days and those same issues will be discussed again on second reading of this bill.

The issues are exactly the same as those raised by the minister in his budget address and which have been debated by the House