

Income Tax Act

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, the minister seems to be acting like an emperor today, but I remind him that it is this committee which decides what questions can properly be put. Granted, he has the option to refuse to answer questions regardless of what they are, but in no way does he have the right in a high-falutin' way to tell us that we can talk ad nauseam about various questions but that he will not answer.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Chairman told me that.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, the minister is burying his head in the sand. The most pertinent part of Bill C-56 is the question of the provincial sales tax. The appropriate place to deal with it—as we do with every standing committee—in this committee of the whole is on clause 1. That is the point at which we should be dealing with general questions. When we are dealing with this bill clause by clause, this very same minister will be standing up on his hind legs and telling us that we can deal only with technical things. He will do that when we are dealing with clause 30. He will tell us that we have no right to ask general questions.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: He will impose closure. That is the way he will operate.

Mr. Stevens: The minister is under a lot of pressure. He is very nervous today.

Mr. Chrétien: You are backing a loser.

Mr. Stevens: The minister has a few members sitting behind him who are very uncomfortable with some of the answers he has been giving with respect to the present situation regarding the provincial sales tax in Quebec, so I do not doubt that he would like questions to cease. However, let me put one further question.

Mr. Parizeau has raised the suggestion that because of the delay which may ensue regarding the federal payment in relation to the provincial sales tax reduction, debt in Quebec might be incurred which would result in interest having to be paid. Mr. Parizeau would like to be reimbursed for that interest. It is estimated that it might amount to \$8 million or \$9 million. Would the minister indicate whether the federal government is willing to reimburse Quebec for that?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Chairman, I will be able to reply when we are on clause 30.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Take the Fifth Amendment, Jean. It would be a lot easier.

Mr. Stevens: Perhaps the minister could indicate why he has appeared to be so ready to cooperate with respect to questions of a general nature touching on the provincial sales tax. At our request he even tabled a letter from Mr. Parizeau. Why did the minister appear to be so ready initially, and why is he now simply saying that he will not deal any further with the provincial sales tax matter until we reach clause 30?

The Chairman: Order, please. I hesitate to intervene at this time. I maintain my ruling, and I hope that whatever answers are given, or whatever questions are asked, hon. members will not be prevented from expressing their opinions. The path being followed by the hon. member for York-Simcoe is to address himself to specifics. That has been allowed by me for one general purpose, to facilitate the work of the committee. I know the hon. member is the spokesman for the official opposition on this question.

● (1632)

This matter has been the crux of the debate on second reading, and it preoccupies all members of the House. I wanted to allow the hon. member to go beyond what has been permitted because this is supposed to be a general debate and it is not meant to be a specific debate on a clause. But because the new ways and means motion is in front of the committee only now, and also because of the letter of the Quebec minister of finance, I have allowed all these questions. It has been left up to the Minister of Finance to decide whether or not to answer them. It is within his rights to decide whether or not he wishes to answer them at this time, because there will be a further opportunity to answer them when we reach clause 30. I cannot quarrel with his decision. I can only hope that hon. members will not spend the time asking these questions when we are on clause 1, when they can do so when we reach Clause 30. This does not prevent hon. members from asking questions on general policy. It will be up to the minister to decide whether he wishes to answer them.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Chairman, I will be very brief.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order. Again it is to try to facilitate—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Smile, you're on camera.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Chairman, it is truly remarkable when one has to sit on this side and watch the kangaroos opposite in action. My point of order was simply this: if the minister is so anxious that we get to clause 30—and he seems well disposed to tell us anything we want to know once we reach clause 30—would he consider standing clauses 1 to 29 inclusive and letting us consider clause 30 right now, and perhaps he will feel more relaxed to give us some information which we would obviously like to have?

Mr. Chrétien: If the hon. member is willing to pass the 29 clauses right away, I will go on to clause 30.

Mr. Stevens: I proposed that we stand them.

The Chairman: Order, please. Either solution is impossible until we accept the new ways and means motion.

Mr. Chrétien: We can do that with the unanimous consent of the committee.