

Ways and Means

The argument is made that there is some right on the part of the house to have a discussion with Mr. Speaker in the chair. The answer to that, of course, is very simple; it is that this debate is not a budget presentation. But in passing let me observe, in case it becomes relevant to any point which may be made in the course of this discussion, that we have an established practice now which was not the practice in the early years of confederation. In the earlier years the budget speech was sometimes delivered in the house, sometimes in committee of supply, and sometimes in committee of ways and means. It is only since 1875 that the practice was established of having the speech delivered with the Speaker in the chair; and even after that it was not always the practice to resolve the house into committee of ways and means, for in five years at least, 1875, 1878, 1889, 1892 and 1896 the procedure followed was to resolve the house into committee of supply.

But, sir, let us deal with the practice as we have it, the practice that a budget presentation is delivered on a motion to resolve the house into committee of ways and means in accordance with the second part of the first section of standing order 58. There was a suggestion here on Friday that if there were not a budget presentation now there would be a departure in that regard from a long standing practice of having a budget presentation. Mr. Speaker, there was a budget presentation this year. It was on April 10. But if hon. members opposite are saying that in every calendar year since confederation there has been a budget presentation they are wrong. There were suggestions of that kind being bandied about very freely if not in this house then outside it on Friday last. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that there was no budget presentation in the calendar year 1907 and no budget presentation in the calendar year 1910. It is not without significance, Mr. Speaker, that those were years of a Liberal government and the minister of finance—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we should confine the discussion narrowly to the point of order and the Chair would then be quite prepared to give its interpretation.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The minister of finance at that time was none other than the redoubtable W. S. Fielding—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):—the dean of ministers of finance in Canada.

Mr. Speaker: Order. With all due deference to the Minister of Justice, I think we should come to a much narrower approach to the point of order and unless there is someone else

who wishes to address the Chair or to introduce a new argument the Chair is quite prepared to give its decision.

Hon. Paul Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, may I seek to address myself to the point which is concerning Your Honour, and understandably so, because the situation before us is somewhat unique. It is true that standing order 58 clearly provides that there is a circumstance, the presentation of the budget, which excuses the automatic operation of standing order 58. Of course we have not heard from the Minister of Finance himself. It is not clear whether we are going to have a budget de novo, although the Minister of Finance spoke to the contrary the other day. However, it might be a budget in some form which has a relation to the budget already presented to this house in this fiscal year.

Because of the difficulty which obviously confronts Your Honour and confronts all of us in interpreting standing order 58, may I suggest to Your Honour that to understand the situation fully one must bear in mind the events which have occasioned the procedure in the house at this moment. There was a presentation of a budget. There was an assurance that there would be given to members of this house the opportunity of a traditional debate in accordance with the length of time prescribed under our rules. This did not eventuate.

The budget was delivered one night. The Leader of the Opposition was given the opportunity of replying during the course of only 15 minutes. That was the only debate which took place on this year's budget. The rules were not so interpreted or recognized by the government to permit six days of debate. The only speech that has been delivered on the budget, in connection with which I argue we are now going to hear something further from the Minister of Finance, was the 15 minute statement made by the Leader of the Opposition in the house the night that the budget was presented. Dissolution intervened and the government has found it necessary to bring in some additional amendments to the budgetary program in the form of orders in council providing for emergency situations arising out of our balance of payments position.

The Minister of Finance is going to discuss the present financial situation in relation to the budget introduced last spring concerning which no opportunity has been given to the opposition parties to comment, except for the abbreviated statement of the Leader of the Opposition. The result is that while there may not be an obligation annually, as the Minister of Justice says, to observe the desirability of bringing in a budget, apart altogether from what is proper the fact is that