

APPROPRIATION BILL NO. 2, 1985-86

THIRD READING

Hon. C. William Doody (Deputy Leader of the Government), moved the third reading of Bill C-54, for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the Government of Canada for the financial year ending the 31st March, 1986.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, may I say a few words with regard to Bill C-54? We were told that there was great urgency that this bill be enacted.

The bill, as we know, will give legal effect to the balance of the main estimates and to supplementary estimates (A).

We were told earlier this afternoon that the reason for the urgency arises from the fact that the provisions to provide the money requested in supplementary estimates (A) have been put in with the provisions based on the main estimates.

I am not questioning the urgency for the money in supplementary estimates (A). Senator Doody has given us a reasonable explanation of that. But the problem with which the honourable senator had to deal arose from the fact that two sets of estimates were bundled together in this bill.

Bill C-54 passed the House of Commons much earlier than the main appropriation bill normally does. Had that bill gone through the House of Commons right at the end of June, the difficulty to which Senator Doody refers would be even greater than it is now.

I suggest to the Leader of the Government and to the deputy leader that it is not advisable to try to short-circuit the process when, in fact, one appropriation may be required early and the other may be required only several weeks later. It is not appropriate to piggyback, in a sense, the money for the main estimates needed in July on a set of supplementaries for which there may be genuine urgency. I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the Government takes my point and will convey it to the appropriate officials.

As I said yesterday, the appropriate officials are often quite indifferent to the requirements of Parliament in these matters; and no doubt under one government, as under another, we have to keep insisting that Parliament is important in the constitution of this country. I believe that all honourable senators will support me in that position.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear.

Senator Doody: Honourable senators, I will simply say that I do, indeed, take Senator Stewart's point. It is an ongoing battle; it is not exclusively the Public Service in Ottawa that likes the convenience of short-cuts from time to time. That applies also to the provinces.

This may be an appropriate topic to raise before the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance when either the minister or officials from the Treasury Board appear before the committee. We could bring this matter to their attention at that time.

I certainly appreciate the comments of Senator Stewart. Motion agreed to and bill read third time and passed.

PRAIRIE FARM ASSISTANCE ACT

BILL TO REPEAL—THIRD READING

Hon. R. James Balfour moved the third reading of Bill C-41, to repeal the Prairie Farm Assistance Act and to amend the Crop Insurance Act in consequence thereof.

The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. H. A. Olson: Honourable senators, I had no intention of speaking at length on Bill C-41. It is a very simple bill. Why I am rising at this stage, with the question being put on the motion for the third reading of this bill, is to inquire as to the status of some questions put to the sponsor of the bill during his speech in the debate on the motion for the second reading of the bill.

● (1440)

Senator Argue made a very good speech, a speech in which he reviewed the history of the Prairie Farm Assistance Act. During the course of that excellent speech, he asked a number of questions of Senator Balfour, none of which has been replied to by Senator Balfour. I am surprised. Surely there should be some response from the sponsor of the bill in the Senate to those questions.

The problem I face now is that once I sit down, I will have had my last kick at it, too. So, I have to put the whole of the matter before you before I resume my seat.

The question of vital importance to many of the producers is: In respect of those areas that were covered by the Prairie Farm Assistance Act, what is this government going to do with the Crop Insurance Act?

There are no important amendments set out in this bill. It is very much a housekeeping exercise, a cleaning-up exercise with respect to the amendments to the Crop Insurance Act identified in the bill. But there are all kinds of rumour or speculation, or something like that, that this government intends to load a far larger share of the cost of crop insurance on to the producers.

I do not know whether that speculation has any validity or not. But surely the sponsor of the bill in the Senate ought to be in a position to advise us as to whether or not that is the policy or intention of this government.

The year 1984 demonstrated what a valuable substitute all-risk crop insurance is for what PFAA used to do. It was far more adequate. It covered a larger portion of western Canada, and indeed other parts of Canada. When we had a widespread crop loss from drought and other things last year, it proved to be extremely important.

I do not remember the precise figures given by Senator Argue, but it seems to me that there was something over \$300 million paid out of that fund, a fund that had been established and funded by three levels: the producer, the provincial gov-