

Business of the House

Your Honour considers this. On behalf of the official opposition we are prepared to proceed with the other government order today. I am referring to the customs matter. This will provide Your Honour with the required time to deal with this matter, to decide whether or not debate on the bill should commence, or whether there ought to be a new way and means motion. My proposition is not unreasonable in the most unusual circumstances the House found itself in this afternoon.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the effort of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) to be helpful, but we are not faced with an unusual situation at all. Frequently points of order are raised in respect of matters before the House, and Your Honour requests some time to consider the points of order and render judgment later. In the meantime, usually we proceed with the business before the House. In this case, I believe it would be desirable to proceed, as was indicated earlier by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). If the speech of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) is a long one, perhaps hon. members of the opposition will have a chance to make up their minds before they speak at eight o'clock.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): This happens to be Wednesday. We do not sit at eight o'clock.

An hon. Member: You do not even realize that it is Wednesday.

Mr. MacEachen: Then hon. members opposite would have a chance to consider the matter until tomorrow.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) should know that the position of my party is very clear, not only on second reading, which is the extent of the agreement in government caucus, but on the bill as it stands. We propose to oppose the bill as it now stands.

However, that is not the issue. I imagine it is entirely at Your Honour's discretion, but the issue is whether or not it is a wise precedent for parliament to begin consideration of a bill today which may not be properly before parliament. If that in fact is a dangerous course upon which we might be embarking, it would be in the interests of parliament, of orderly debate, and of providing the government with the time to speak with members of its caucus who are not prepared to support this matter on second reading to defer the bill. It would provide the government with time to arrive at a more complete agreement in support of the measure in the name of the hon. Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The discretion for the calling of business on the order paper under government orders is entirely that of the government. Certainly we are not making a new precedent by having a matter considered by the House while it is under review procedurally. Obviously it would not be desirable to become involved in several days of debate on a matter

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

which might be reversed on procedural grounds, but it is certainly not a new practice or a new experience for us to allow the matter to go ahead while the Chair is reserving. That discretion is not one the Chair enjoys, to presume on the decision one way or another, until such time as I have had an opportunity to examine the precedents and render a decision. Under the circumstances, I will attempt to render a decision as soon as I possibly can.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-56, to amend the statute law relating to income tax and to authorize payments related to provincial sales tax reductions, be read the second time and referred to committee of the whole.

He said: Mr. Speaker, before I commence my remarks, I should like to indicate that I am pleased with the decision to proceed at this time. A debate on this bill will be extremely useful because it has stirred up a lot of confusion and discussion. It is appropriate for everyone to speak his mind on this matter. The hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) was worried about the extent of support that this measure received in our caucus. In due course he will see that discussions occur among government members, and that the bill has been discussed in many forums. The position I will attempt to establish will assist opposition members in making up their minds. They do not seem to understand what we are talking about.

It was unbelievable to hear the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) talking about the tax proposition of October 1 when we are dealing with the April 10 budget. For that reason, and in order to facilitate the debate so that people will understand, I think I should make this speech. I will make it as factual as I can so that the people will be able to understand the issue a little bit better.

● (1622)

Bill C-56 implements the principal measures advanced in my budget of April 10. That budget was designed to provide a modest and responsible stimulus to give a lift to our economic recovery and to ease inflation. It was also designed to encourage structural adjustment in the Canadian economy, particularly in the fields of energy, transportation and research and development.

I will deal today with the specific measures of the budget, and discuss in some detail the proposal to contribute toward temporary reductions in provincial retail sales taxes. But I would like to speak first about the economic context of the