

Oral Questions

It becomes important because, in effect, what happened was that the government heralded this as a budget, in its proportions and in its importance, and had the Minister of Finance speak during the debate on the Speech from the Throne when, traditionally, statements of this nature have been brought to the House in a budget speech, which would give six days of debate specifically related to budgetary matters.

That is one aspect of the question upon which I rise, namely, that members have been deprived of that kind of debate by this procedure. It may be completely legal, but it is questionable in the parliamentary sense.

● (1212)

The second matter I should like to deal with is that the usual courtesies were not extended to all the opposition parties in terms of consideration in advance of budgetary matters which have traditionally accompanied what has been a budgetary speech. I am not talking about time, because there was to be a 30-minute preview. That was extended to an hour because it was requested. I am talking in terms of the documents themselves, which have traditionally been allowed to be viewed in their entirety by the critics of the parties during the lock-up. That did not occur on this occasion.

The document I have in my hand was tabled with consent because of the situation we were in last night. The document is entitled, "Economic and Fiscal Statement". It was available then. It was not dealt with in the meeting but it was referred to in the speech of the Minister of Finance. By failing to do that, and by operating as if it was dealing with a budget, the government denied one of the traditional avenues to the opposition parties and, indeed, to all members of parliament.

We cannot allow this practice to continue. The government cannot have it both ways. If matters are to be dealt with in a budgetary way when we are dealing with budgetary matters—which was the purport of the speech—members of parliament are entitled to all the protections and courtesies with respect to budgetary matters that have been traditionally extended, unless there is agreement to the contrary. I must say there was no agreement to the contrary.

Our understanding of this entire matter was that there was to be a speech delivered on economic matters through the course of the throne speech debate. If it was to be otherwise, the government owed opposition parties, the Parliament of Canada and the people of Canada, the courtesies they would otherwise extend on budgetary matters. This is something which has to be looked at carefully, because they have smuggled a budget into the throne speech debate, without the courtesies or examinations which are traditionally allowed.

I rise on this occasion because it came to my notice this morning, after the time in which I could give Your Honour formal notice, the fact that parliament had been sidestepped. I may be wrong. I am not suggesting it was done in bad faith. It might be viewed as smart politics or slick parliamentary procedure, but however it came about, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance should convey these views to his minister.

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

The Minister of Finance is not here. Therefore, I feel he should be made aware of the fact that we believe parliament has been sidestepped in a very important way. Perhaps there are other members who want to deal with this matter further, because it is quite serious in terms of limiting the rights of members of parliament to deal for six days with items which are budgetary, outside the usual throne speech debate.

We all talk about proceeding within the rules of the House of Commons, shortening speeches, limiting time, working on semester systems, in order that parliament may function better. Also, we would like a better committee structure, and private members' hour to be improved. There is a whole host of things which will be dealt with at some time when we look at the procedures of this House.

I say to the parliamentary secretary that this is not the way to go about it. This place operates properly with reasonable consultation and consideration. It is not only what ministers and members would like it to be, but what it, in fact, is. In terms of the budget, parliament was short changed by the government. I take this opportunity to bring the matter to the attention of the parliamentary secretary so that he will take it to his minister.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. No notice has been given to the Chair of the intention to raise this point by way of a question of privilege. This question relates to something which happened yesterday, and not something which happened during the proceedings this morning. If I permit that to be done, without notice, on one occasion, I will have to permit it to be done again and again, without proper notice. The matter does not constitute a question of privilege. No motion is attached to it. I cannot permit expanded discussion on something which is not a question of privilege and does not conform to our procedures.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PETITIONS

BELL CANADA—FIRST REPORT OF EXAMINER OF PETITIONS FOR PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has laid upon the table the first report of the examiner of petitions for private bills, praying for the passing of an act authorizing Bell Canada, city of Montreal, province of Quebec, to increase its capital stock, and for other purposes.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order on two counts.