

Excise Tax Act

former government was trying to get as much business through as possible so we could get out on the hustings, Mr. Harris would not have brought in those resolutions preceding those bills if it had not been made clear to him that such was absolutely necessary. There are a few other examples in history, but these are the most recent ones, making it clear that even when there is nothing in a bill but the reduction of taxes it is still a matter that should be considered in committee of ways and means.

There is a good deal of language in the authorities about upsetting the balance of ways and means. When private members seek to move changes in taxation, even by way of alleviation, that language is thrown at them; that we cannot upset the balance of ways and means. I would also point out that if it is in order for the minister, without a prior resolution, to introduce a bill amending the Excise Tax Act, the purpose of which is to reduce a certain tax from 10 per cent to 7½ per cent, what is to prevent me from introducing a bill reducing it from 7½ per cent to zero? If it is in order for the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill amending the Income Tax Act, without a prior resolution, providing for an increase in the exemption for dependants under the Income Tax Act to the extent of \$100, what is to prevent me, without a prior resolution, from introducing a bill raising that exemption to a much higher figure?

The whole basis of ways and means resolutions is to keep authority for the balance of ways and means, authority for financial policy, in the hands of the executive subject to approval by parliament. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this is a serious departure from our practice which the minister is asking parliament to follow.

It is surely not necessary for me to say, but perhaps I had better do so before the minister speaks, that this is not a case of questioning the substance of this or any other bill that may be introduced regarding taxation. But even when measures are placed before parliament which parliament may welcome and pass unanimously, it seems to me it is still desirable that they be dealt with by parliament according to the rules and practices of the house.

I say again, Mr. Speaker, that all of us recognize that if it had not been necessary to have ways and means resolutions prior to tax reduction bills, Mr. Harris would not have had the house take up the time on ways and means resolutions as was the case last April. Therefore it is my contention that whatever welcome the house may be

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

prepared to give to this legislation, it should be preceded by consideration in committee of ways and means.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Speaker, if I may speak to the point of order for a moment, there was some brief discussion of this matter on Friday night, and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has now put it forward formally by way of a point of order at this stage. I think, therefore, it is essential that we dispose at once of the suggestion made inferentially now and made very definitely on Friday night that somehow or other the procedure now being followed by the government is an abuse of the rights of parliament because, of course, it is no such thing.

This house is not being denied any opportunity which it should have to discuss these proposals. I quite understand that perhaps it might be unwelcome to some hon. members opposite that they have to discuss these proposals, because in spite of what they have said it is obvious that whatever may be the merits of the proposals, every opportunity is sought by them to oppose progress on these measures simply for the sake of opposing.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I am amazed at that statement coming from my hon. friend.

Mr. Fulton: The hon. member has referred to what took place on the budget last spring. As I shall have occasion to point out in the course of my remarks in somewhat greater detail, the reason the bills for reductions of taxation in the spring budget were preceded by resolutions in committee of ways and means was precisely because at that time we were considering a budget, the annual financial presentation of the Minister of Finance, and discussion of the whole financial picture of the country was before the house, as it is required to be.

Our rules provide most clearly that that discussion, which takes place once a year, is made on the motion for committee of ways and means. It is for that reason that that committee was set up at that time, to pass the resolutions which were preparatory to the introduction of the bills arising out of the budget. But here we are faced with an entirely different situation. This is not a budget. We are working within the confines of the budget proposals made to parliament and approved by parliament last spring. This is not an annual financial presentation and therefore a resolution for committee of ways and means is not required.

I should like to elaborate a little on the two aspects of this motion. First not only