

I consider to be the matter of public importance that is now raised is the wisdom or desirability of the present treaty on the Columbia. The statement that the Leader of the Opposition asked to debate was the statement that Canada's interests were sacrificed in the treaty which has been signed by Canada and the United States with respect to Columbia power.

Now, the urgency of debate on that matter, to my mind, has to be determined not on the fact that the chairman of the international commission made a statement last week, but on whether there is an opportunity for the house to deal with the matter before the consequences of the treaty become effective. The treaty cannot become effective until it has been ratified, and the house is assured that it will not be ratified until the house has had an opportunity of debating it.

We are therefore faced with this proposition; that before any harm to Canada's interests can arise, the house will have an opportunity to debate this issue. It seems to me that takes care of the argument about the urgency of debate. This treaty was signed something in the neighbourhood of a year ago and has been discussed from time to time, and I recall that another motion was made under this same rule to debate this same treaty about a year ago.

The contrary argument to that which I have been accepting is that there is something in the statement which General McNaughton made which is of urgent public importance in itself. I cannot see how it can be important except in relation to the treaty which he is discussing. As I have said, the treaty cannot be implemented until it has been debated.

Mr. Hellyer: Would Your Honour listen to one point on this particular question?

Some hon. Members: Order. Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: I will hear the hon. member if he has something to say. It seems to me that to ask to interrupt the important business which is on the order paper under this rule is unwarranted.

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Trinity): The point you have just made, sir, is that the question of urgency revolves around the question of the consequences of the treaty being signed or not signed at this particular time. May I just call to Your Honour's attention the following statement by the Minister of Justice in Vancouver last year as reported on July 25:

The United States will not wait forever... if it's not settled in a matter of months, we are in danger of losing the whole thing.

Surely there are consequences implied here which can be either way, consequences if the

treaty is ratified and consequences if the treaty is not ratified, and it seems to me a matter of urgency that we have a discussion of the facts so that we shall know these consequences.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: I appreciate that the matter may be looked at in different ways, but I have a clear view that the matter of urgent debate must be one of public importance and significance, and that is public importance arising out of the importance of the treaty itself and its consequences. To my mind no public interest will suffer if this is not debated today, and there will be plenty of opportunity to deal with other aspects of the statement made by the chairman of the joint commission.

PRIVILEGE

MR. CHEVRIER—CONTROL OF EXPENDITURES BY HOUSE

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): I rise on a question of privilege. The question of privilege that I wish to discuss has to do with the right of the House of Commons to vote the expenditures of public moneys by the Queen's ministers. The House of Commons has the right to control these expenditures; and after the discussion we have just had, and particularly having regard to the statements made by the Prime Minister and others, I say there is a clear right on the part of the house to discuss expenditures.

We have before us in the house at the moment in further supplementary estimates No. 4 a commitment to spend \$138 million. That money has not yet been voted. Notwithstanding the fact that these matters have been before the house from time to time, March 31, which is the end of the fiscal year, has gone by and there has been no complete opportunity on the part of the house to dispose of this matter.

I say to you with respect, sir, that the government has a constitutional obligation to pass these supplementary estimates before dissolution. This is a fundamental right which the elected members of parliament have, but instead of that, on Friday the house leader chose to announce hypothetical legislation for today and I say, with respect, that the government has delayed consideration of these estimates although we have asked for them repeatedly.

I also say to you, sir, with respect that the Speaker has a responsibility, and a very serious one, in this matter. The Speaker is an officer of the house, and he has the responsibility to uphold the rights of the elected representatives in the House of Commons.