

bility of the ministry. On that occasion, there was something beyond a mere factual announcement or beyond a statement of government policy; there was an announcement under statements made by a minister. It was a very extensive announcement.

The practice seems to be that Standing Order 15(3) has a limited application. In that limited application it appears that the word "may" allows for some discretion on the part of the government. But parliamentary practice, parliamentary tradition and other things are not to be turned aside lightly. We regard any shift in the ministry, perhaps we regard a change in the ministry to be more important than some members of the government do—as an important change requiring a statement here in the House, not a press release. We believe that custom, tradition and indeed the precedents and practices of the House of Commons, as we found out during the constitutional debate, are just as important as the Standing Orders and demand being observed.

I say to you, Madam Speaker, with respect, that the government, and the Prime Minister in particular—I am surprised at the government House leader, with his knowledge of parliamentary practice, supporting the Prime Minister in this; I am sure he never advised him with respect to this matter—ought to have made this announcement in the House. This change was significant enough that, within the framework and parameters of those practices which are the Chair's duty to protect for Parliament's sake, the announcement ought to have been made in this House of Commons. It can still be made in this House of Commons so that members can address themselves to it.

I am not going to argue the question of the Crow rate because I have not looked into that. I respectfully suggest that there is an argument that precedent, custom and practice, which are just as much a part of the rules of this House as are the Standing Orders, demand that appropriate action be taken by the government and that a statement be made here in the House, notwithstanding the fact that there has to be a debate on a bill later on. That latter point is peripheral and I suggest does not apply. But the government is bound by law to bring in a bill. This is what the government House leader says and I do not argue with him there. That only provides an opportunity for debate on the bill. What we are talking about is the observance of the rules with respect to statements by ministers, particularly statements by the Prime Minister, announcing changes that are rather substantial in the ministry. These do involve traditions and precedents of this House, which have to be looked after or they will wither away.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker: I should like give a ruling on this matter, to resolve the debate we have just had, but to do so I would have to be able to refer to a very clear-cut rule of procedure that would indicate exactly how I should direct my decision. However, the provision in our Standing Orders that deals with statements by ministers is permissive, as the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) said, and not mandatory. It says

Designation of Ministers

very clearly that a minister may, when motions are called, make a statement on a matter of policy or any other subject he may find appropriate.

The hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) has said repeatedly that it was customary for ministers to make statements in the instances we are dealing with today. I have looked at some of the precedents, and precedents exist for both procedures. My reference is the Standing Order which clearly indicates that the minister has the option of making or not making a statement. Custom has supported decisions by ministers either way. The hon. member is aware that the Speaker of the House cannot oblige ministers to make a statement in the House. It is up to the minister to decide whether he wants to make a statement in the House or prefers to make an announcement outside the House. Hon. members may abhor this custom, but the rules are clear: it is up to the ministers, and if hon. members do not appreciate the manner in which the government announces its policies or its activities, they may keep on questioning the government inside the House until a minister finally gives in, but it is certainly not the role of the Speaker to oblige a minister to make a statement. Finally, I believe the problem can be resolved by the following Citation 264, page 87, Beauchesne's fifth edition, which I shall quote in English, since I have the English version here:

[English]

The option of a minister to make a statement either in the House or outside it may be the subject of comment, but is not the subject of a question of privilege.

[Translation]

I believe that was the case just now. We have had two comments on the subject, and I think the hon. member has had ample time to make his comments before the House and criticize the minister for not having made a statement on the matter in question. I should like to quote a precedent, a decision handed down by one of my predecessors:

[English]

Just to keep the record straight, since the hon. member has made reference to it, it reads:

The practice of making a statement is a practice which is within the authority of the minister to choose whether to do so here or not.

[Translation]

Hon. members have expressed their views on the government's decision to publicly announce changes in a department. Hon. members are free to disagree with this procedure. They can voice their complaints before the House and they have done so. I have listened to them because I felt they had something to say, and I am sure hon. members will understand that I cannot make a ruling obliging the minister to make a statement.

● (1530)

[English]

Mr. Nielsen: For the sake of the record and my convenience I wonder, Madam Speaker, if you would be so kind as to