

suppose we could choose a more appropriate day to debate a topic, and we should be doing a lot more of that. So the government indicated it was anxious to get into the debate.

The hon. member for Chambly suggested that we extend the hours to allow more members a chance to speak on a topic that you would have enjoyed being part of yourself, Mr. Speaker, if you were sitting in the House and able to participate in this very appropriate debate where some eloquent and useful speeches were made. Lo and behold, out of the blue comes the government Whip calling for a quorum. The result was that we signed at the table. There were six Liberals and six New Democrats. This was a Liberal opposition day and there were no Conservatives, except the Speaker who signed in. As a result the whole matter collapsed.

We were surprised at that time. I remember discussions being carried on as to what this meant, because it had not happened before that on a government supply day the government decided to curtail debate prematurely. The government was in a sense superseding the order of the day, the consideration of supply. The House is no longer giving consideration to giving the government money. What the government did was no accident. It was a determined effort to conclude the day prematurely.

Mr. Milliken: To gag the opposition.

Mr. Riis: We can talk about gagging the opposition. We have seen enough of this with 34 closures of one kind or another. We could not believe on this issue that we would see this because of the implications. It is not that we are surprised at some use of closure. This unfortunately has now become a pattern, but the fact is that this would completely offset the whole government program of supply. I believe this is a question of confidence, a question of privilege as my friend, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, indicated. It certainly demonstrates a lack of competence on the part of the government.

• (1550)

What do we do? Can the question that we expected on the Order Paper today be put again? The convention of this House is that the same questions cannot be put

Privilege

continuously. At the beginning of the session on April 3, 1989 the question was put and it stated:

That the House at its next sitting consider the business of supply.

That motion no longer stands. Can we reinstate it and go back and readdress ourselves to the same motion? The convention of this House is that that is not the usual procedure. That is why I say perhaps prorogation is the most obvious answer to this dilemma.

I simply want to add our support to the very thoughtful points put forward by the hon. member from Vanier. There are further points that other members want to add. I simply want to summarize by asking these questions. Is it possible that the same question can be put twice in one session of Parliament? Is it not the responsibility of the government for maintaining quorum when we are dealing with government supply? It seems to me that those two matters are pretty straightforward and should not be abused in the rather silly and trivial way that we saw here last Friday.

I do want to suggest that at this point the House has lost its prime role, and that is the granting of supply. What is our role in this procedure now? We have no motion before us and if, Mr. Speaker, you allow the government to put the motion which it should have put today, if it was going to, then at least we should debate that motion and we should vote on that motion. There is no question of that in my mind.

I can only assume that the government did not know what it was doing on Friday and has been caught in a very embarrassing situation. Its incompetence is obvious. The precedents are simply unavailable unless we go back to the 1877 precedent in Westminster, which indicates just how sloppy the government has been in dealing with its business.

If the government is not prepared to consider prorogation, then I say we look forward to debating the motion when it comes forward again. We would hope that the government would not simply try to slip it through without debate, as we did at the beginning of the session, because now the whole terms of reference of how we proceed with government supply obviously has been dramatically changed.