

Business of the House

Mr. Nielsen: Madam Speaker, if those braying donkeys, as the Prime Minister is wont to call members in the back benches of the Liberal party, would stop their braying, I might answer two or three points which were raised by the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

His House leader knows that last Friday I informed him that the allotted day scheduled for this Friday would be the New Democratic Party's day, subject to the approval of my caucus.

Mr. Broadbent: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: I see the House leader of the New Democratic Party nodding his head in agreement. It was very clear. The matter was taken to my caucus yesterday and, because of intervening events, I did not get that approval. I conveyed that message to the House leader of the New Democratic Party, and I am sure he will agree with that. That is the fact. I was not privy to any conversation which took place between the leader of the New Democratic Party and my own leader.

An hon. Member: Talk to Joe.

Mr. Broadbent: Ask him.

Mr. Nielsen: There may have been a breakdown in communication between the leader of the New Democratic Party and his House leader, and similarly here, but certainly the understanding between myself and his House leader was very clear.

An hon. Member: Address the Chair.

Mr. Epp: There is no Chair.

Mr. Nielsen: There are still four allotted days, and now five by virtue of the Chair's ruling, left in this semester. Ordinarily, the fair share of those days would provide two to the New Democratic Party. I can assure the leader of the New Democratic Party, as I did assure his House leader just before three o'clock, that it was our intention that they should have that fair share of those days remaining. It is fully our intention to supply them with those days, as they are entitled to a fair share of the 13 allotted days between March 27 and June 30. I can assure the leader of the New Democratic Party that his party will get the fair share of those days. However, for him to suggest that there has been a usurpation of the rights of the minority party in opposition is not fair at all. There has been no usurpation.

An hon. Member: You try to dictate what they are.

Mr. Nielsen: I hear an interjection from a member of the NDP that he does not like to be dictated to with respect to allotted days. The fact of the matter is that the Standing Orders placed the obligation for the utilization of those allotted days in each of the semesters to Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Under the Standing Orders, there is no obligation to allot either allotted days or votes attached to the New Democratic Party, and indeed it was the practice of previous

House leaders for the opposition not to allow any votes to the NDP. But as the NDP grew in number, we thought it fair that they should have a fair share, and that is now the practice. That will continue to be the practice. There is no point in complaining they are not getting their fair share, because they are. Those are the facts of the matter.

● (1540)

There is one other point to which the Leader of the New Democratic Party alluded. He suggested I somehow had knowledge that his party intended to file a motion. I had no such knowledge from his House leader or from any other member of the New Democratic Party that there was such an intention. I had been advised that the leader of the New Democratic Party was very strongly of the view that we should go to a particular subject matter. I will not mention the subject matter. I do not think that would be proper. But I was informed that he felt very strongly that on behalf of his party he wanted to go to a subject matter which was different. However, I was informed of that by his House leader just before we came to the end of the question period between two and three o'clock. I had no such foreknowledge, as he suggests, and I hope he will accept that because I know it would be confirmed by his own House leader.

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: I hope we can conclude this debate. This is the first time I have chaired—despite my wish to do so—a meeting of House leaders. I can only reflect on how wise it is that the Chair does not preside at House leaders' meetings. I have never understood so well the meaning of that custom. If the Chair were presiding at such meetings, there would be no possibility for negotiations, and I think we all understand that it is necessary to negotiate these things. If the Chair were to preside at those meetings and have the final word, the only thing that could happen would be that there would be a strict application of rules. Sometimes negotiations are beneficial before we go to the strict application of rules.

I allowed this discussion because I felt the House needed to air this problem at this particular time. I hope now that negotiations can go on—that we can proceed to the business of the House.

Mr. Nielsen: There will be none. There can't be.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, I rise on two questions. One might well be a question of privilege relating to my rights as the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The other is a question to the Chair.

I wonder if the Chair would advise the House whether the attention of the Chair had been drawn either to the filing of the notice at 1.12 p.m. this afternoon by the opposition House leader or to the contents of the motion filed.

My second question, which may well have to do with the rights of the Leader of the Opposition, has to do with the fact that I rose while you were speaking at the first mention you made of delivering a ruling. Until that time it had been my