

Private Bills

Mr. Speaker: I am in the hands of the house. It is not yet five o'clock and without unanimous agreement we cannot move the clock ahead.

Mr. Churchill: We have a simple notation on the order paper with regard to the hour, and if certain business is completed then do we not normally move on to the next order of business? Why would there be a hiatus of half an hour or several hours between one piece of business and another?

Mr. Speaker: I think the difficulty is that the time of the house now is reserved for government business, and as long as there is government business on the order paper we could not pass automatically to the next order of business, which is private members' business. Perhaps a motion could be agreed to that we now proceed to the business in question?

Mr. Churchill: I would move that we now proceed to a consideration of private members' business, private bills, special order.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Veterans Affairs has suggested a motion to pass to private members' business, but I am afraid there is a technical difficulty to accepting the motion. In effect it would be necessary to suspend standing order 15, which regulates our business, and that can only be done on proper notice. The alternative, in the absence of proceeding with the order paper, would be to move that the sitting be suspended until five o'clock.

Mr. Hellyer: Perhaps now that hon. members have had a chance to reflect quietly on this, unanimous consent might be given to moving the clock ahead to five o'clock.

Mr. Herridge: We agree to that proposal.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the house may be willing to agree unanimously that it is now five o'clock and proceed to the business that is ordered for that time.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Howard: We agree to call it six o'clock, if the government so desires.

Mr. Speaker: The house will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on the order paper for today.

PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Speaker: Before putting the motion with respect to Bill SD-2, is the house agreeable to consider the divorce bills in groups?

Mr. Howard: I think they should be called in the order they appear on the order paper.

[**Mr. Churchill.**]

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): I wonder whether hon. gentlemen who have expressed their views strongly would give consideration to the taking of these bills in groups. They have received the full attention of the other place and each of them has been examined. If there are some cases that hon. gentlemen regard as needing further examination, well and good, but I would point out the fact that the people who made these applications did so in good faith.

The law has been as it is and they accepted in groups and if we proceed to ask for royal assent in what has been done at a quarter to six this evening, these bills will die when dissolution takes place. The result will be that those who have the right to expect that parliament will deal with their cases will suffer irreparable loss, besides being subjected to a long delay before the next parliament.

I realize there are strong feelings on this matter. At the same time I do something I have not done before—I make an appeal to hon. members that they permit the taking of all the cases, excepting those they designate as a result of their reading as desiring further consideration. I would hope it would not be said of us that we, under law, denied those who are proceeding under law their rights and privileges.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): I should like to make a comment on the suggestion made by the Prime Minister. His remarks and the appeal he has expressed now have been uppermost in our minds for the last three years, ever since we became interested in the procedure followed in parliament in dealing with these particular cases.

Over the past few years, perhaps too vigorously at times, we have proposed a variety of alternatives to the present system. Without going into the full details of those alternatives, we have asked that, even though there should be no great desire or agreement to proceed to establish an alternate procedure, at least the government should indicate that it be made the subject matter of intensive study by a royal commission. Were that done it would indicate the government was taking steps to deal with this particular question, which might even be confined to the question of parliamentary divorces.

As I say, we have proposed a number of alternatives but they have all reached a dead end. That is very regrettable to me. It is painful to me, to the hon. member for Timiskaming and to others who concerned themselves with the problems and difficulties facing the individuals making petitions to parliament. Indeed it is difficult and painful at this last hour, as it might well be, to have