

*Inquiries of the Ministry***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**CONSIDERATION OF LABOUR AND FLAG
LEGISLATION, ESTIMATES, ETC.

On the orders of the day:

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the right hon. Prime Minister regarding the labour standards act, which is a piece of legislation in which more than 500,000 workers in Canada are vitally interested. I should like to ask the Prime Minister whether we can be given some assurance that this legislation will be proceeded with before the flag debate is recommenced, in order that we may be sure it will be passed before Christmas.

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker, I can give the hon. gentleman no such assurance.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, in the event the amendments which are being prepared are ready, will the Prime Minister assure this house that he is prepared to interrupt the flag debate, if it takes up a great deal of time, in order to make sure that this legislation is dealt with prior to Christmas. I am assuming that the Prime Minister is genuine in wanting this legislation passed.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, there should be no necessity of interrupting the flag debate in order to get this important legislation through before Christmas.

[*Later:*]

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): I should like to direct a question to the government house leader and ask him, in view of the statement made a moment ago by the right hon. Prime Minister that the flag debate is of prime importance between now and Christmas, whether he thinks there is any purpose in holding additional meetings of house leaders to try to arrange the business of the house.

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (President of the Privy Council): I do not agree with the hon. member's statement concerning what has been said here today. I thought it was made quite clear that there are two matters of prime importance to the government which we expect to have done before Christmas. One of these is the flag question and the other is the labour standards bill.

An hon. Member: How about the Canada pension plan?

[Mr. Gordon.]

Mr. McIlraith: Well, the pension plan is moving very precisely and very well. I hope the estimates are moving very well also. I do not accept the hon. member's statement or interpretation of what has been placed on the record. Since I do not accept it, I cannot answer the question.

Mr. Douglas: May I ask a supplementary question. In view of the fact there has been no agreement about a limitation of time on the flag debate, we can only assume that if the government decides to put the flag debate first there can be no guarantee that the labour standards bill will be passed before Christmas. Is this the interpretation we are to take from the statement of the minister and the statement of the Prime Minister?

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to interpret things in a particular way to suit his own purposes. There has never been at any time an indication by the government that the house will do certain things. The responsibility of the government is to submit legislation to the House of Commons, and the House of Commons disposes of it. All the government can do is submit legislation in the order that it thinks is the most appropriate way in dealing with its responsibilities of office.

When agreement can be reached on the limitation of debate, that is very acceptable. I feel it is common knowledge that the Prime Minister has been on record for at least two years, when these things were the proper subject of debate, as saying he thought there should be limitation of debate on the items of business coming before parliament. However, be that as it may, we have obtained limitation of debate rather successfully, I think, in the eyes of all hon. members, in the last couple of weeks on some subjects. I personally hope we might get it in the future. We cannot give any commitment at the moment as to what the House of Commons will do with the items of business that are submitted.

Mr. Douglas: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the house leader's statement that the government's responsibility is to introduce items in their order of importance, am I to take it from his statement and that of the Prime Minister that the flag debate is now much more important than the labour standards act?

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman has no right to draw such conclusions. The remarks I made will appear in *Hansard*