

Point of Order—Mr. H. Gray

place in today's Order Paper under the rubric "Government Business".

The important thing that both Hon. Members and the public understand is because it happens to be under Government Business means only that at some later date, if the Government wishes, it can call it as Orders of the day. When that is done the matter is then before the House. It is not automatically assumed procedurally that something that happens to be under Government Business will automatically be called. Many times these matters are not called. Sometimes they are called many weeks or indeed months later.

So that there is no misunderstanding, because I heard at least one Hon. Member saying "What is the appropriate time for the Chair to rule?", the appropriate time for that is of course if the Government takes the next step and moves to bring the motion in front of the House. I hope that is clearly understood by all Hon. Members. I say it is not appropriate to be dealt with now because it has not been called as Orders of the day. Just because it is on the Order Paper does not necessarily mean it will ever be called. That is a procedural matter, but I am bound to proceed according to the procedural rules as they are laid out.

I might well be asked why the Chair listened to some opening remarks at this time. The answer is because it is obviously a very important matter to both the opposition Parties and it is helpful to the Chair to at least have heard some opening remarks with respect to the parameters of debate. That is why I have taken what may seem to be an unusual but I hope useful step in hearing both the Hon. Member for Windsor West and the Hon. Member for Oshawa, as well as the Minister, of course.

I thank all Hon. Members for their courtesy and the interventions, which have been helpful to me.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, in some press reports over the weekend it was suggested that the Government House Leader had consulted with the Table and that this procedure had been tested and proven to be correct. I just want to make sure that is not the truth, the report is wrong, and the Government is not using the Chair as an argument in support of its motion.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gauthier: I strongly object to the Government using the Table or the Chair to back up a lousy argument.

Mr. Mayer: Get serious.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member is an excellent parliamentarian and when he raises a point the Chair is very much inclined to listen. Let me just dissuade all Hon. Members from one thing to begin with. So far as the Chair is concerned, it is not the place of the Speaker of the House to be saying to the Government, yes, this or that procedure is necessarily right or wrong. With respect to the Table Officers, at least since I have

been Speaker, it has been made very clear to them that I want them advising all Hon. Members in this House as to the procedural appropriateness of anything they wish to propose. That includes both research offices of the opposition Parties, and no doubt from time to time the Government as well. The whole purpose of the Table, and I am sure the Hon. Member and others will understand, is to give as much possible procedural information on these matters as we possibly can.

While it may very well be that as your Speaker I have perhaps pushed harder to make sure the Table is available for consultation, I think, and I hope others will support me, that this has been helpful to the House rather than detrimental. Certainly whatever efforts have been made by the Table from time to time for all Members in explaining the procedural rules, so far as I know there has been nothing untoward said or done that would not fit with past practice or indeed be in the general interests of the place. I just want to make that abundantly clear.

I would hope that on that there would be no necessity for debate. If any Hon. Member on either side of the House has any complaint with the Table, then I would ask that the Chair be given some notice of it in advance and perhaps it can be dealt with in that way.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could make clear to the House and those watching us that where advice is sought by a Member from the Table on procedure, that advice is not in the nature of an advance ruling, making the step intended to be taken by the Hon. Member, including a government Minister, any more acceptable than if the advice had not been sought.

The reason the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) raised the point is that the press reported that the Deputy Government House Leader had attempted to justify to the public the validity of the step he was taking with respect to the motion we have been discussing on the basis that he had checked it with the Table. It should be made clear that while, as you say, Sir, the Table is there to provide advice and be helpful to all Members, having sought and received that advice the Hon. Member acting on it does not have anything in the nature of an advance ruling. If a point of order or question of privilege is raised about that step, you, Sir, are the sole and final arbiter.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member may well have helped to clarify the position of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). The Hon. Member is of course absolutely correct. It would be quite improper for the Chair to indicate to one of the three Party Leaders in advance what kind of ruling it might make on anything. It is certainly sometimes helpful for the Chair to give an indication to all three Party Leaders or to all three Whips at any given time what the Chair's sense of something is. I, of course, have done that occasionally when I thought it was helpful to all three Parties.