

Nordion and Theratronics

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Committees can do as they wish. Most of the time they do not have to stop for a vote. By virtue of Standing Order 108, they can do what they please.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point. In answering the question that the Member just put as to whether Members should be in the House when division bells are ringing, it has been a longstanding tradition that Members who are called to the House of Commons should come here to vote, to exercise their first democratic obligation for this House.

Having said that, I also understand the difficulties that we can get into when we have committees sitting during the ringing of bells. The Whips of all parties are always conscious of the number of Members that are in committee and the number that are in the House. I guess people looking in on the deliberations of the House wonder sometimes where the members are. They are indeed in committees.

I would like to have the Speaker understand that what we are asking for is a ruling as to what happens when the division bells are ringing. It is our purpose to assure the good working of the committee. Our presence at those committees is important. Our democratic right to be heard at those committees is important. Committees are a creation of this House and therefore should understand that the House comes first. When the House calls for a vote then this is where Members should be. I do not understand why we have not applied that Standing Order, that rule that states that the votes are first and foremost, which is what we should be doing here in this House.

I do not want to belabour the question, but I think there is a strong prima facie case here, Mr. Speaker, for consideration by a committee as to what happens in this Parliament now that the numbers are somewhat equalized. When a committee is sitting and the bells start to ring, does that committee continue to sit or is it going to be the practice of the committees to adjourn and have the Members come here to vote? I think that must be answered, otherwise some committees will pressure Members to stay and other committees will let them go. The Whips will have a difficult time deciding which committee sits and which committee does not sit. There has to be one rule for all of us, that we either come here to vote or we stay in committee. I would like to know what the answer is going to be to that question.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point of order. The Hon. Member rose under the guise of a question of privilege and interrupted the Minister of State for Privatization for the second time during his remarks on a second reading speech. The rules, as I understand them, require that a Member of Parliament wanting to raise a question of privilege do so at the earliest possible opportunity.

Ms. Copps: That is what I did.

Mr. Beatty: If the Hon. Member was complaining about an incident that took place previously, which she could have dealt with previously, then there is no reason in the world why she could not have immediately raised this matter on the floor of the House of Commons.

Ms. Copps: I was voting.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member shouts from her seat now. Members will be very much aware of the fact that she had already risen prior to this with a frivolous point of order to interrupt the Minister of State for Privatization. She apparently did not feel, when she was on her feet previously, that this was a matter of any importance. The rules are quite clear. Members of Parliament are obliged to raise questions of privilege at the earliest possible opportunity. The Member who was recognized in the House chose not to do that—

Ms. Copps: I did not know about it.

Mr. Beatty:—and chose instead simply to interrupt on a frivolous question of privilege at a time which is not permitted under the rules, and in so doing interrupted the Minister of State on an important contribution that he was making to second reading.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you have already given your guidance to the House and that any further discussion of this is a question of your ruling.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I think two points need to be made in terms of the latest interjection.

The Hon. Member for Hamilton East made the point of her prima facie case of privilege that she was explaining as a result of information brought to her attention. I can vouch for the same situation. A number of Members from the New Democratic Party caucus were in the same situation and brought to my attention the fact that they could not be in two places at the same time. They were wondering which should take precedence, a call to the House for an important vote—after all, Mr. Speaker, we were voting, virtually, on the implementation of the Budget, or a number of tax provisions within the Budget. All three votes were serious votes. It was important for Members of Parliament to be here to register, to stand in