

Standing Orders

Does the Whip on the government side not understand that logic? Would he not agree that at this stage where we are indeed rewriting the books that would be a fairer approach to House business, that it would be in keeping with the spirit of the McGrath committee, and that it would be a much more just and equitable position?

Mr. Fennell: Madam Speaker, as the Hon. Opposition Whip indicated, we have had discussions on this matter. I am sympathetic. I believe that 25 is too high.

I would like to state what my opinion is right now, but he has put me in a somewhat embarrassing position because at the present time there are meetings going on right across the hall.

Mr. Gauthier: They are watching you.

Mr. Fennell: They are probably watching me to see what reaction I have to this question.

Mr. Gauthier: Inspire them.

Mr. Fennell: They may expire me, that is, keep me in this job forever. If I stated that 10 per cent or 20 per cent was right, they may come charging out of that room and hit me over the head before I could finish answering the question.

Let me say that I am very sympathetic to my friend, the chief Opposition Whip. However, I am frightened of my own colleagues who might be tough on me—

Mr. Gauthier: You are an honest man.

Mr. Fennell: —if I come up with an answer in advance of the conclusion of that meeting.

Mr. Gauthier: That is the best answer I have heard you give in the House of Commons.

Mr. Crosby: Madam Speaker, I should like to make a comment and also ask a question of the Hon. Member for Ontario (Mr. Fennell).

As I read the foreword to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, it makes it clear that the House has been deliberating the Standing Orders since December, 1984, and that the rules of the House currently in effect have been adopted, changed, and in a sense are in a state of limbo because they are merely provisional rules.

I want to point out to Members of the House of Commons that the Standing Orders are more than just rules governing Members of the House of Commons in their day to day debates and deliberations. They in fact establish the internal procedure for the House of Commons, which is of interest to a much broader segment of the public and the community than merely Members of the House of Commons. There is a great and grave public interest in some stability and some permanency to the rules which govern the processes and procedures of the House of Commons.

One can imagine the difficulties of a person or institution interested in a Bill before the House of Commons not knowing what are the lengths of debates, how long debate could be protracted, and a variety of other matters.

My question to the Hon. Member for Ontario is: Is it not generally in the interest of Canadians to have Standing Orders of the House of Commons which make it clear what are the rules of the House, what rules govern the processes and procedures? Does he not think that that interest goes beyond the membership of this Chamber and extends to other interested parties, so that the Government would be derelict in its duty if it did not intervene to create this permanence in relation to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, and so that the deliberation which has gone on over three years will finally be put to an end and everybody will know what are the rules, processes, and procedures of the House of Commons?

Mr. Fennell: I should like to say that the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) probably has one of the greatest grasps of Parliament. He understands it. He understands the implications to the public. I really appreciate the Member asking that question. I failed to bring out the fact that we are trying to adjust provisional rules. As I said before, I spoke an hour and a half one day. I remember days when the Hon. Member for Halifax has spoken for an extended period of time, but that is not what the public wants. People want us to have fast and concise debate. They want to hear the arguments on both sides instead of the rambling of the past. The Member brought forward a very important point to Canadians who elected us to come here.

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Earlier today, the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) proposed to move an amendment which reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the first semi-colon and by substituting the following: "and

That the Clerk of the House be authorized and instructed to print a revised edition of the Standing Orders of the House, renumbering as may be deemed necessary and making such technical and consequential changes as may be required."

The Chair has had the opportunity to review the Hon. Member's motion. Because of Citation 424(3) and (5) in Beuchesne's Fifth Edition, I have little choice but to rule it out of order. If the amendment were allowed and adopted, the effect would be to render the main motion unintelligible. The amendment, therefore, is not acceptable.

Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet).

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau): Madam Speaker, I want to speak on the motion proposed by the Government and indicate at the outset that I am very disappointed by the action of the Government. I have listened carefully to what has been said by the Government House Leader and also by the Government