

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 4, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON PRAIRIE GRAIN STABILIZATION BILL

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): I rise on a point of order with regard to the business of the House, Mr. Speaker. On Friday last the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader said, when dealing with the Business of the House:

...Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government House leader announced that Monday's business would be Bill C-244. I think everyone in this House knows that discussions are taking place between the federal agricultural minister and the agricultural ministers of the western provinces. I wish to report to the House—and I have so advised the House leaders opposite—that these discussions may continue. In that case, rather than call the agricultural bill on Monday we will continue with the measure now before the House. The House leader will endeavour to notify opposition House leaders as early as possible on Monday.

Subsequently a press release was issued on behalf of the minister in charge of the Wheat Board and the three agricultural ministers for the prairie provinces which indicated that there might be a cease-fire or armistice as the case may be. While we were not a party to that, there is no doubt that it is the desire of all members that the best interests of the farmers should be served. However, Mr. Speaker, it was our opinion at the time that this was all conditional upon certain changes being made in Bill C-244. I now find that my impressions in this regard are not correct and that the government will be proceeding with Bill C-244 today, following the shortest armistice in history. I just want to make it plain, Mr. Speaker, that this party did not at any time request a postponement of Bill C-244. Despite all the bleating in high places about what the bad opposition is doing to the poor timid little government, they have carriage of the government business, when to bring it on, how long to keep it before the House and when to end it.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words with respect to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Peace River. I do so in the belief, from telephone conversations that have taken place this morning, that it is now the government's intention to call Bill C-244 today rather than Bill C-259 as was indicated Friday afternoon by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council. If that is the intention I wish to register a very strong protest. Not only was the statement made on his own initiative by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council on Friday afternoon but we were advised from the government side about the intentions for these few days.

• (2:10 p.m.)

As the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board knows, because we have since confirmed the telephone conversation to which I shall refer, he telephoned me on Friday afternoon and indicated that as a result of the discussions between him and the prairie Ministers of Agriculture there was a desire to have a moratorium for a few days or perhaps a week. The terms of that moratorium were, in the main, two. First, Bill C-244 would not be proceeded with today; second, we would not continue to hound the government over its non-payment of the amounts due under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act. I indicated, as House leader for this party, that I would recommend to my colleagues that we agree to this truce, this cooling-off period, or whatever you want to call it.

It was my clear understanding that Bill C-244 would not be called today. It was also my understanding that this undertaking had been given to the prairie Ministers of Agriculture. The reason for putting off the debate on Bill C-244 was that the minister in charge of the Wheat Board—perhaps more than that, the whole government—wished to give consideration to the requests made to the government by the prairie Ministers of Agriculture, which included a request for certain changes in this bill. There was no misunderstanding between my hon. friend and myself. It was clear that "consideration" did not mean that the government would necessarily agree to the things we were requesting. But it was also clear that there would be consideration in good faith. It was made clear to me that after consideration had been given the prairie ministers would be advised of the position. We would also be advised and we would resume at that point. That kind of agreement having been discussed on Friday, I submit that the government, in wishing to go ahead with Bill C-244 today, is not operating in good faith.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I make the point that I did not telephone the minister in charge of the Wheat Board on Friday. He telephoned me. We did not ask for this cease-fire, this cooling-off period; the government asked for it. We said we were prepared to agree to it.

But the one point that was made very clear by the minister in charge of the Wheat Board was that the government would not proceed today with Bill C-244. If I may spell this out, I thought it was an agreement for a full week and the minister said no, not necessarily for a full week, it might be for three or four days. For the government to come back and ask us to debate this bill today is not only breaking faith with us here on the floor of Parliament but breaking faith with the Ministers of Agriculture who were promised that their pleas would be given consideration. I recognize that some of the things the minis-