

leader of the New Democratic Party knew what was happening.

I do not go to House leaders' meetings to establish the basis for that lack of knowledge. I start from the House business question last Thursday, when I put the usual question to the government House leader and asked him what he intended. There was nothing about this. In violation of the traditions about which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre spoke, and in violation of everything we have come to know about the rules of the House, the government House leader at six o'clock apparently—this is what he said, anyway—went to the Table, filed a three-page document and held a press conference. That was the first time any of us knew what was on the mind of the government House leader except, of course, that he was impatient to get on with this. He had said that publicly, and we knew that. We knew that from our discussions.

That is the situation in which we find ourselves. What is the result of what he asks this House, and now the Chair, from the point of view of this point of order, to accept? He asks the Chair to accept a violent change in the Standing Orders of this House. It is not a simple change but a violent change in the Standing Orders of this House. I think we should all understand what it is about.

The first thing he wants us to do in terms of the motion itself is to suspend private members' business. He wants to extend the hours of the sittings of the House of Commons on various days as set forth in the motion. He wants us to lose the right to debate a motion that is important and fundamental to the country, the motion which deals with the Constitution. This is not the dogfish subsidy. It is not a change in the legislation respecting the Minister of Supply and Services (Mr. Blais). It is nothing like that. It is the basic Constitution of the nation, and he wants us by this order to agree to a violent change. He wants to cut out adjournment debates. That may not mean anything to hon. members of the government who do not have questions of the ministry to put in adjournment debates, except planted questions from time to time.

An hon. Member: Sure we do.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): But that right to question and that right to debate the issues happens to be important to members of the opposition and important to Parliament.

The other thing we must remember about this is that the government House leader is really saying he is not happy with the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. These are the Standing Orders that protect the rights of every member whether sitting on my side of the House or the government House leader's side of the House. They are not happy with them. These were the Standing Orders of the House which, in 1969, were pushed through the House of Commons by closure. There have been arguments about the curtailment of the rights of private members with respect to the existing Standing Orders as compared to what they used to be. That was one set of closure rules. We are living under them now, and every observer of the House of Commons, even those who do not sit

here in this place, thinks that the present rules are most inadequate.

● (2030)

The government House leader has finally decided, because of something his colleagues have said, because it is imperative to the government's plans, I suppose, or to somebody's plans that something be done by a certain date, that even these rules are not satisfactory and that the government must initiate a brand new process and deny rights, such as curtailing my right and that of other members of the House to speak about a subject that is important, thus flying in the face of 100 years of tradition. These things are not done without consultation which must go far beyond merely saying, "I want that through." The government should indicate in these consultations what it intends to do, and that did not occur.

I do not think this House of Commons began yesterday. I do not think the traditions of this House began yesterday or when the procedural motion was conceived. The House of Commons is much older than even the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): It goes back hundreds of years. Its traditions, as he has said, have come from another parliament. We have melded our traditions with theirs and developed our own, but those traditions are important to the House, to the members and to the people who are represented by members. That is the issue I want to put forward by way of a preliminary statement regarding the feeling of resentment which is being felt in Parliament over the apparent use of the government of its majority to push something through and, if it cannot do that, to change the rules and to fly in the face of the traditions, customs and precedents of which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre spoke.

To put it bluntly, Madam Speaker, we look to you for some protection. You are the first commoner, you are elected by all members of the House. You were nominated by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), your nomination was seconded by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), and every one of us was proud to support that motion. You have a unique obligation to ensure that even the things that are not mentioned in the Standing Orders, the customs and traditions of Parliament, are observed. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has said—I will expand briefly on his remarks with respect to the subparagraph on the written speeches a little later—this does fly in the face of those customs and traditions.

I will sum up briefly on the motion itself. I think it is an insult to Parliament. I say this directly to my friend, the government House leader. Aside from being an insult, and over and above the good point made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre—and he did make a good point—it is procedural garbage in other ways as well. I hope to be able to develop as best I can an argument on three other points which are, I believe, in error with respect to this motion.