

Standing Orders

The intent of this motion is to permit the Government to govern and eliminate the time spent on dilatory motions. I think it is very important that we accept these changes. They are not moved with antagonism or animosity. There is no hidden agenda. The intent is simply to deal with legislation out in the open as we have been elected to do, but not to be controlled and directed by the Opposition for time immemorial.

I notice that you are on the edge of your seat, Madam Speaker. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to speak on this motion today.

● (1610)

Mr. Belsher: Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Ontario (Mr. Fennell). What times can he envision that Bills will be sent to a standing committee rather than to a legislative committee? Is that inherent in the motion before us, or do all Bills have to go to a legislative committee?

The reason I ask that question is that there is legislation which has been prepared from White Papers into which the standing committees have had a great deal of input. They have conducted hearings across the country, and during the hearing process they have often said that there will be another opportunity for people to make a presentation on what they feel should be done with legislation after the Bill has been brought before Parliament and goes to a committee.

If Bills are only to go to legislative committees, the composition of a legislative committee will not necessarily be a mirror of the people who are on the standing committee. I should like to hear the Hon. Member's comment on that point.

Mr. Fennell: Madam Speaker, a very important discussion took place in that regard. There was much discussion that perhaps legislative committees were not really a necessity. However, it was decided by many that they serve their purpose in certain instances.

I refer to Bill C-42 and Bill C-56, two financial Bills which have already been studied by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. In effect they have gone back to that committee by agreement. This also transpired in the cases of Bills C-18 and C-19. The Hon. Member was on that committee. They went to the Standing Committee on Transport and they were important to that committee because it had already reviewed the National Transportation Act in advance. It had already heard the witnesses, so all it really had to do was go across the country to review it with certain witnesses to get input on the possibility of change or amendments to the two Acts.

I think it must be based upon agreement by all Parties. For instance, it is the people on the Finance Committee, from both the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, who have worked with the Conservatives to convince their House Leaders that it would be a good idea to refer it to a standing committee as opposed to a legislative committee. It is really an

agreement among all Parties, but it depends upon what has transpired—

Mr. Belsher: Is that still there?

Mr. Fennell: That is still there; the option is there. We can or cannot do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I have a question for my friend the Hon. Member for Ontario (Mr. Fennell). A short while ago, the Parliamentary Secretary to the House Leader came to the House and said: I can promise you that we are not going to use Standing Order 9(4)(a). And in order for people to understand what it means, I would like him not only to elaborate on this, but also to answer a question. This Standing Order makes it possible for a Member, when the Speaker is in the Chair, to—

—propose a motion, without notice, to continue a sitting through a lunch or dinner hour or beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment for the purpose of considering a specified item of business or a stage or stages thereof—

Only if 25 or more Members then rise to oppose it is the motion deemed to have been withdrawn. During our negotiations with the Government... It is because I know the Conservative Whip is favourable to this idea that I direct my question to him.

[*English*]

In discussions with the Government, I, for one, proposed that to demand that the Opposition needs 25 people to oppose a motion under Standing Order 9(4)(a) to prolong a sitting of the House beyond the normal adjournment hour was unjust because it exceeded a quorum in the House by 5, the quorum being 20. It also requires that members of the Liberal Party and the NDP who have small numbers in the House be involved in a difficult and sometimes demanding race to sit in this place because we have committees sitting or other things to do. We must all run in here between four o'clock and five o'clock to prevent the Government from extending the sitting past the adjournment hour.

I suggested—and I still propose it—that a new rule should be written where 10 per cent would be the factor involved—10 per cent of the Government or 10 per cent of the combined Opposition. That could stay on the books for years to come as an objective figure which would be used to decide whether or not we should have a motion under Standing Order 9(4)(a).

That would provide fairness and would provide members of my caucus and me with an element of justice in terms of representation. For example, the Government has 211 Members, and 10 per cent would mean that it must have 21 people in place to prevent the Opposition from moving a motion under Standing Order 9(4)(a) to extend debate beyond the normal adjournment hour. It would also give us, in terms of our numbers, the fairness of having 10 per cent, which would be seven, to prevent the Government from proceeding with a motion under Standing Order 9(4)(a).