

Order of Business

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is why I allowed the hon. member to have the floor, so that he could make that correction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, there are in fact Standing Orders which govern the proceedings of the House. If hon. members complain about the large number of so-called private members' bills and the fact that the House cannot deal with all of them during a single session, I agree with them. That is a shortcoming which a parliamentary reform should correct. However, Mr. Speaker, there is a Standing Order which is quite clear and which establishes an order of priority for private members' bills.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Which Standing Order?

Mr. Pinard: Standing Order 20. One may or may not agree with its provisions, Mr. Speaker. One could also be in favour of a parliamentary reform. I, for one, am all for it. However, until such time as those good wishes become reality through everyone's co-operation, I feel we have no choice. We are bound by Standing Order 20 which, in this instance, determines the order of precedence of private members' bills. Such is not the case for government bills of public interest; Standing Order 20 applies to private members' bills we are dealing now. If the Standing Orders of the House did not prescribe that order of precedence, there would be no problem.

Standing Order 20(1) is very clear. Unless otherwise provided, and no other provision is mentioned, the day to day precedence, and here we are not speaking of going from one session to another, on the order paper of private members' business shall be as follows: first, third reading and passage of bills. Then follows a list of business in which second reading of bills ranks quite low. That is the situation. Hon. members may have personal feelings about it. Wishes can be expressed that the House update its procedure and hon. members be given more opportunity to study public bills during the hour set aside for private members' bills. All sorts of reforms can be suggested. But until such time as they are accepted, regardless of how acceptable they may be, we must respect the Standing Orders of the House. That is very clear.

If Standing Order 20 did not prescribe that order of precedence, specifically for private members' business, the problem would not even arise. So, reading that Standing Order, I wonder whether we should apply it or not. If we must, we must, though I admit that this may be hard to accept for those hon. members whose bills have yet to be discussed. But we must ask ourselves what the intention was of the legislator or whoever conceived of this rule. Why, at some point, was an order of precedence prescribed for private members' bills? The only logical argument I can find is that it was doubtless presumed that once a bill had been discussed on second reading and, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) pointed out, reported from committee, it would

[Mr. Towers.]

probably take very little time to pass third reading, and thus this would in fact do little to hamper other bills that have reached second reading. That is the only logical argument I see which could have prompted the person or persons who drafted rule 20 prescribing an order of precedence, but they undoubtedly wanted precisely not to allow it to be said that during private members' hour nothing ever gets passed, bills are systematically talked out. Once a bill manages to pass second reading without being talked out, then let us give it priority and pass it—for once a bill is not killed on second reading. It passed the committee stage. Hear, hear! Then it is passed on third reading, and we go back to the other bills on second reading most of which do not go beyond the second reading stage because they are talked out.

Mr. Speaker, that is the rationale I see behind S.O. 20.(1). If a bill has passed all stages and reached third reading it would be unfair to say: Although you were not killed on second reading, you will never see the light of day because there are a multitude of other bills before you. There is a rule which says you have priority, you have gone beyond second reading in committee, you go first. You are going to be passed on third reading, and then we are going back to other bills.

That is the only rationale I see behind the rule. Once again, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I will say that my argument might seem very academic, it applies to this case but we are bound by the rules. I am not suggesting I agree with the procedure as it exists; what I say is that we do not have a choice. The procedure exists, it must be applied until it is changed. I would agree to having it changed eventually, but in the meantime, I respectfully submit that we do not have any choice and the rules must be applied as they exist.

● (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, not only is the argument of the parliamentary secretary academic, but it is also terribly unfair to private members of the House of Commons who have little enough opportunity, as the parliamentary secretary knows, to have matters considered.

I know that the Chair is mindful of the precedent cited by the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) with respect to Bill C-208 standing in the name of the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan). From looking at Standing Order 20, one could make the argument, if one confines one's eyes to that which appears in Standing Order 20(1) only, that certainly there is an order of precedence established as follows: "Third reading and passage of bills". If that was all the Standing Order said, I would have to agree with the parliamentary secretary, but it goes on. There is another paragraph on the next page which may have escaped him. The marginal note says "On adjournment or interruption". I am going to quote that paragraph because it applies to what we are dealing with here. It says this:

After any bill or other order in the name of a private member has been considered in the House or in any committee of the whole and any proceeding