

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 12, 1985

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

DISPOSITION OF BILL C-70

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order in hope of solving what I can see will become a problem. You indicated yesterday that you were going to hear procedural arguments on C-70 today. I would submit that the argument might be better if it could be heard now for the following reason. I think you will have to consider the argument once it has been made and then rule on it. Given that there can be only one debate because of the nature of the grouping, the whole argument will be redundant by the time we make it if the Speaker then requires time to consider it while the debate is going on. It sounds a little complicated, perhaps it is just a lack of sleep or something, but what I am trying to say is that I would like very much if the Speaker would consider hearing the arguments before we proceed to debate, and sufficiently in advance of the debate, in order that time be allowed for the Speaker perhaps to seek some advice and consider what he has heard. I make that point.

Mr. Speaker: I understand the point. I tried to indicate yesterday that I would hear the matter at eleven o'clock if it were called. I was trying to be very careful yesterday in my wording. It was late last night, I agree.

It would have been my intention to have thought about the arguments for a little bit and perhaps make some comment at three o'clock. In the context I think I can still hear the arguments at the beginning of the debate when it is called and make a decision as expeditiously as is appropriate for the Chamber. Another technical difficulty would be to hear argument on Bill C-70 when it is not called. However, I could not do that as it would not be in order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

REPRESENTATION ACT, 1985

ALLOCATION OF TIME TO CONSIDER THIRD READING STAGE OF BILL C-74

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council) moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-74, an Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 and the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and to provide for certain matters in

relation to the 1981 decennial census, one sitting day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the said Bill; and

That 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for the consideration of government business on the above-mentioned sitting day, any proceedings then before the House shall be interrupted, if necessary, for the purpose of this Order and, in turn, every question necessary to dispose of the said stage of the said Bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to debate our desire to place time allocation on Bill C-74. I first want to put some specific things on the record and then refer to the general question of time allocation.

The House will understand that the amendment presently before the House is a proposal to send the Bill back to committee. I will first review what has happened to this particular Bill. It received exhaustive study when the Government tabled a White Paper on redistribution prior to the Bill being introduced. It was, in effect, pre-studied. The Bill itself had intensive study in committee over the course of six weeks. Witnesses were called and their testimony was given careful consideration by both the committee and the Government.

As a result of those deliberations and the contributions of many expert witnesses, the Government proposed two amendments to the Bill, at report stage so that this Bill which goes to the very root of Parliament, that being representation, would be readily acceptable to all concerned. During the debate on second reading and in committee the members of the Official Opposition made the point that the Bill as written was a violation of the principle of representation by population. That matter was addressed and that aspect of the Bill was deleted. We made the changes necessary to correct that situation.

Therefore, I submit that in proceeding to amend the Bill to coincide with the views expressed by the members of the committee and the witnesses who gave evidence, the Government has now responded to the concerns that were expressed. It is our position that it is not necessary to send this Bill back to committee for further study for the reasons I have already listed. We are now trying to wrap it up.

It is important for the House to understand that if the issue of representation goes to the very heart of Parliament, we have to approach that issue properly. That means putting this Bill in place so the various electoral commissions can fan out across the land and construct the boundaries of our ridings in such a way as to be as fair as possible to all Canadians. That process can only start if we get this Bill through. Therefore, I find the disarray among the opposition benches to be unfortunate for the people of Canada. I find that this filibuster which is under way is harmful to the issue of representation which is, as I say, the very essence of Parliament.