HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 1, 1964

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. KNOWLES—EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS TO DISCUSS UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FUND

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I raise this question of privilege at this moment because it will lead to a suggestion which may need to be acted on under motions, which we should reach momentarily.

Yesterday the house learned with, I think, an element of surprise of the precarious state of the unemployment insurance fund. Like other members of the house, we in this party feel that any concern over this matter should be allayed as quickly as possible. We feel arrangements should be made today for dealing with the item in the supplementary estimates which would provide authority for loans to be made to the unemployment insurance fund.

Therefore we of the New Democratic party feel that arrangements should be made for this item to be dealt with, and toward that end we are prepared to suggest, and we do so unanimously, that there be a sitting of the house tonight from eight o'clock to ten o'clock on the understanding that the item respecting the unemployment insurance fund be called not later than eight o'clock this evening.

Hon. Paul Martin (Acting Prime Minister): The hon. gentleman has made a suggestion. I had intended to rise on motions and suggest that since this is the eighth day on which the house has been considering these supplementary estimates—I say this in the spirit of trying to meet the proposal the hon. member makes, because it will be recalled that we dealt with supplementary estimates on the 13th, 16th, 25th, 26th, 30th and 31st of March, and we shall be dealing with them today—it does seem to me the hon. gentleman is right in suggesting that the consensus in this house is that it might be desirable for us to meet tonight. I would suggest that we meet between the hours of seven and eleven o'clock. This would be without any prejudice, of course, to a careful examination of the matters before us.

The suggestion the hon. gentleman has made is one which fits in with my interpretation of what I think is the feeling of the house, having in mind that we have been dealing with these matters this week and that we shall wish to continue this tempo of discussion. I would strongly suggest that the course proposed by the hon. member is one which we might take into account, and I suggest the hours between seven and eleven.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, to begin with I would point out that the hon. gentleman, with that capacity for being non-provocative, misstated the situation with regard to the time taken on these estimates. He mentioned "seven days". In fact the following is the time taken: on Monday the 16th, one hour; Wednesday the 25th, 30 minutes; Thursday the 26th, one hour. I point out that the suggestion that we sat for the number of days to which he referred is entirely baseless.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, may I just say that I agree fully. I was not trying to suggest that the supplementary estimates had been the subject of discussion during the whole of those days. I just mentioned that we had discussed them on those days.

Mr. Ricard: You were trying to suggest that we took the whole day.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the high minded reason for the suggestion, but it is none the less completely ill founded. Having said that, we are here for the purpose of doing the business that is required to be done—

Mr. Habel: Then get your members back.

An hon. Member: How about you?

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, is the hon. gentleman making a contribution from his usual position?

Mr. Starr: Yes, the same position.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I find it very difficult to understand what has happened here. Excepting for the dollar item and the subsequent item we were given no explanation of the situation connected with this particular fund. We used to be told "Oh, if a new government comes in all these difficulties will end; there will be no overdrawing of the unemployment insurance account". I am not going into detail