

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 22, 1983

The House met at 11.00 a.m.

• (1105)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): I should indicate to the House at this time that the Chair is in a position to arrive at a decision in the choice of the motions on the Order Paper which are now before the House. If Hon. Members wish to make a comment at this time, the Chair is prepared to hear them out.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, could the Chair indicate what it might be disposed to do without argument, because we might save the time of the House by doing that? I am prepared to make argument but it will take some time. Normally we get an indication from the Chair with respect to these matters before calling for submissions.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a reasonable request. I would also like to hear from the Chair what its predisposition might be without actually making a ruling, because I am equally prepared to argue the point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): The Chair should indicate at this time to Hon. Members that it is disposed to call the motion standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis). The Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) on a point of order.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 62, which in essence provides for three supply periods and 25 allotted days during those periods, is an innovation in the rules. The Standing Order provides that those days are available for the moving of motions by the Opposition. In each of the three semesters, not more than two of those motions will have votes attached. In the supply period ending December 10 are five such allotted days. In the spring semester there are seven and in the summer semester there are 13.

• (1110)

I point out the rules provide that these allotted days are intended for the Opposition. While there are two Parties on the Opposition side of the House, there is one Opposition and that is Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, sometimes called since the days of Mackenzie King the Official Opposition. But the

right to those allotted days is the right of the Opposition, not the Opposition Parties but the Opposition.

Since the invocation of the Standing Order providing for this supply process, it has been the practice of the Opposition to divide the allotted days in a fair way with the New Democratic Party, with the other Party that sits on this side of the House. In all cases, in arriving at that decision there have been several factors taken into account, but the chief one is that the allotment has been determined on the basis of numerical representation on this side of the House. That criteria would be applied and I have so assured the Hon. Member from Hamilton Mountain in this instance.

The total of 25 allotted days, the global number of allotted days available and provided to Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Opposition, the Official Opposition—whatever you want to call it—following the unwritten interpretation on which we have always proceeded as being fair, should be divided by 30 per cent and 60 per cent, or as close thereto as we could come to it. In my view, if you want to look at the rigid and strict interpretation of the Standing Orders, we need not apply any allotted days to the New Democratic Party. The same thing applies to the votes. On some occasions though, having given an allotted day to the NDP, we have withheld a vote until well on into the final supply period.

When we first came back to this interminable session of Parliament we started into the spring semester where there were still some allotted days that had not been allotted in the supply period that had to be disposed of. I take it from where the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain comes that by using a calendar year he may be advancing the argument to you, Mr. Speaker, as he has to me, that in this calendar year we have not yet reached that one-third position. If you take the calendar year he is, of course, correct. But if you take the supply cycle which commenced when we returned, then he is not correct.

I have examined the history of the allotted days, commencing with the period ending December 10, 1980, through to the period ending June 30, 1983. Of course, in this semester we are in now, this will be the fourth allotted day. In the event that this historical work has not been done for you, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to make this examination available for your perusal. In all cases Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Official Opposition, has allotted days to the New Democratic Party in keeping with that fair approach over the period from February, 1980, which was the hangover period, through to June 30.