

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 23, 1990

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

[*English*]

POINT OF ORDER

ALLOTTED DAYS

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Yesterday I rose in my position as the Whip of the government party with a special House responsibility for notifying my members of the time of votes. We had quite an extended discussion in the Chamber about the kind of notice members are required to have for those votes.

There is another issue I would like to raise this morning, along the same vein. For some considerable period of time, and operating with the general consent of the House, shortly after the bells began to ring a clock would appear on our television screens indicating the maximum amount of time that was available for members to arrive in the Chamber prior to the commencement of the vote. This is a very important principle.

All members will know that according to the Standing Orders of the House, it is possible for the Whip of the Official Opposition and the Whip of the government to walk down the aisle and indicate to the Chair that they are ready for the vote, at some point between the commencement of the bells and the maximum amount of time for the bells ring. In this way we can take the vote more quickly.

We did that for particular reasons on two or three occasions. Some members rose subsequently in the Chamber to indicate that they were not happy with us moving more quickly than the clock indicated. In other words, the clock was providing them with information that in their minds was not correct. We have had these arguments expressed in the House.

Later this day, according to the ruling made by the Speaker yesterday, it is very likely that we are going to have a vote. The Speaker has ruled that members have been given adequate notice of a confidence vote on a Friday, a very unusual circumstance. I cannot remember the last time it has happened in my parliamentary career, and I have been here about 11 years. Nevertheless, that is the situation we face today.

What members need to know when those bells begin to ring is whether or not the time remaining before the commencement of the vote will be displayed on the television screen. To overcome some of the problems caused to some of the members, and I may suggest it was a tiny minority which led to a kind of administrative decision to take the clock away, I think we can resolve this matter.

There are two people in this Chamber who have the responsibility to walk down the aisle and indicate to the Chair that we are ready for the vote. One is the Whip of the government party, or the Whip's designate, the other is the Whip of the Official Opposition, or that Whip's designate.

When bells begin to ring, if either one of us approach the Chair and indicate that we are not going to walk down that aisle until the maximum time has expired, then the clock could commence on the television screen and members, with a sense of soreness, would know exactly when the time had expired and when the vote was to occur. I think that operates in the best interests of the whole House.

• (1010)

If the clock does not appear, then members have to be alert to the fact the vote might occur at any moment and that they should move quickly. But if either Whip goes to the Table and says: "It is not my intention to walk down until the maximum time has come," then I suggest the clock could come back up on the screen and members would have the certitude of the time of the vote.

Surely, in a democracy, the most important responsibility we bear in the final analysis on behalf of our constituents is to be present in the Chamber to cast a vote on their behalf. It is the reason why notice provi-