

Business of the House

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker, before I ask a question I wonder if I might say on behalf of the New Democratic Party that I want to thank members of the staff of the House of Commons for the way in which they conducted themselves during the impasse. They had to put up with circumstances that, quite frankly, are out of the ordinary—circumstances which I hope they will never have to face again. I am thinking particularly of those who were required to be on call or on duty almost around the clock.

I also want to commend the Chair for the way in which the Speaker handled the dispute. From my point of view, and expressing the concern of my colleagues, it was handled exactly the way it should have been. Whatever criticisms were levelled at the Chair were wrong, in my judgment. I want to make it clear that the Chair enjoyed and continues to enjoy the support of this caucus.

I should like to ask the government House leader whether it might be possible between now and Monday to see a more extended statement with regard to what we might be going to deal with over the next week or week and a half, so that we may begin to make plans for dealing both with the results of our negotiations and also with such things as the remaining allotted day.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, as my colleague knows very well, we will have an opportunity to talk to each other during the remainder of the day. I am sure he will understand that I will be in a better position to be more precise later today or tomorrow or, if need be, on Sunday. I hope to be in a position to be more specific about the business for the whole of next week and about when the last allotted day will be held. This will obviously be known before Monday.

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker, on another related matter, I wonder if the government House leader might be in a position to tell the House his intentions with regard to the question of parliamentary reform. Yesterday there was a very interesting and worth-while debate during which suggestions were made from all sides of the House that could well lead to some immediate discussion about how reforms might be implemented and what reforms might be considered. I wonder if the government House leader might consider telling us today, or whenever he is ready to make a further announcement, whether we might have some structure that would enable us to proceed with actual reform rather than just continuing with the discussion on reform.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, if the hon. member had been in the House yesterday during my speech he would have noticed that I started it with a tear because he was away. I would like him to read what I said.

I will have an opportunity to talk to my colleague later, but it is clear that I intend to go on with the process that I started immediately after the Christmas adjournment when Parliament resumed. At the level of House leaders I will try to look into changes that would not be controversial and that could be implemented in the very, very short term and that would reflect the recommendations made in the past by the Standing

Committee on Procedure and Organization. I intend to go on with that process as soon as we have settled the matter of the national energy bill. Depending on the result of our negotiations, I will be in a better position to look into means that the government could use to modernize the institution and render it more efficient and more human.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, I should like to ask the government House leader a related question. I appreciate what he has said about his intention of pursuing immediately certain matters that could be found to be agreeable to all parties and which could be implemented.

In the debate I suggested on behalf of my colleagues that the matter could be referred to the committee that was proposed in the motion of the official opposition or that a special committee could be set up. I am sure it does not matter which committee as long as some committee functions between now and the summer recess. It could work on a number of proposals that could be implemented on a trial basis during the period between when we come back in the fall and December. I think that what the government has proposed is compatible with my suggestion.

I should like to go further and suggest that what I have proposed is desirable; that is, that we do not just act now on certain matters that we could all agree to immediately—those matters may be limited in number—but that we also get under way the serious project of reform with a view to having some of those ideas implemented by next fall. Would the government entertain that approach?

● (1210)

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I think it would be wiser to wait a few days to see how things evolve before making a reference to a standing committee or a special committee on the broad subject of parliamentary reform. I think it is more urgent than that. In 1975 and 1976 the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization studied for many months many aspects of the rules and came up with some very sound proposals. I think it would be a waste of time to ask the same committee to review again the same question. There are some non-controversial changes which could be permitted now. Once we have agreed on that, I think we could make an intelligent reference to either the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization or to an independent committee which could report to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization within a reasonable length of time.

All those options are open. I would not like to be interpreted as closing the door to any of the proposals of the hon. leader of the NDP, but the first step is the level of House leaders, not in a year but very soon, to see what are the best options to use to ensure that the desired changes be made to make Parliament more real.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, in dealing with this matter, I remind the government House leader that yesterday in the course of the debate the Leader of the Official