

Business of the House

That, of course, has been recognized by you in the rulings you have given today permitting some latitude in this debate, and in maintaining the highest possible traditions of the Speaker's office. It is something which reflects credit upon Your Honour, and also upon the House of Commons as a whole.

There can be no question of imputing motives. There may have been at one time a misunderstanding, but the whole purpose of this debate has been to preserve certain rights.

Mr. Noseworthy: The right to go to bed early.

Mr. Nowlan: Yes; as one gets older one does think about that. Certainly, as was pointed out this afternoon, it is impossible to conduct business efficiently and deal with matters of importance, not only this one bill which is before us but other important measures, in the early hours of the morning. If this amendment is lost and another amendment is adopted by the house before ten o'clock, all of which are contingencies, it is quite possible that this house will be dealing with matters of importance to the nation; and certainly that cannot be done at three o'clock, four o'clock or five o'clock in the morning. That is why I suggest that the amendment not only preserves the rights of minorities or opposition groups; it goes further and assures that there shall be ample opportunity for intelligent discussion of measures which must be dealt with by this parliament before it ultimately prorogues.

The purpose of the first amendment, which was dealt with, was to establish the rights of minorities and the opposition in the face of what seemed like an attempt to steamroller this house. The amendment which is now before us accomplishes two purposes, not only assuring the rights of minority groups but also preserving the right of debate on those matters which may come before us. As has been said, the house has been sitting for a long time. I doubt, Mr. Speaker, even when you search parliamentary records, if you will find that a motion such as this amendment is attempting to avoid was adopted when there were still so many items on the order paper. We have all sat in parliaments which have sat through a night or a night and a day to clean up the business at the end of a session when there were only certain formal matters to be discussed. But that is not the situation here. Various matters of great importance have to be dealt with, and they cannot be dealt with in the manner suggested by the motion of the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

[Mr. Nowlan.]

I should like to urge again, although I believe this amendment should have been adopted earlier in the afternoon when the opportunity was given, that there is still an opportunity to proceed in an orderly way with the discussion until midnight. Then we could adjourn and go on with other matters tomorrow. If the house does not see fit to adopt this amendment, then I suggest that opposition groups will have to preserve their rights, and something must be done to do that. I shall not trespass longer on the time of the house, sir, except to reiterate that there is still an opportunity to accept the principle which is involved in the amendment.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. J. A. MacLean (Queens): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak on this matter for a few moments because I feel that an extremely important principle is at stake. I feel that we in the opposition have a responsibility to the people whom we represent, and that it is at least as great as that of members who sit on the government benches. All we desire is to have the business of this house conducted in such a manner that we shall have ample opportunity to discuss the questions which are brought before us—and they are important ones at the present time—in a calm and reasoned fashion, under circumstances which will permit us to give them our intelligent, reasoned and unhurried attention. If that principle were recognized I feel that the business of this house would be expedited.

This afternoon I read with great interest a debate on this subject which took place in this house on March 18, 1926, when the present rules of the house were adopted. It was pointed out by many experienced politicians and statesmen of that time, including the late Mr. Lapointe, that we as a house should not sit on any occasion beyond the hour of eleven o'clock, in order that we should be in a position to give clear consideration to the important matters coming before us.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, there is still before us legislation which is of paramount importance to many people in this country. It is of great importance that the legislation about to be discussed should receive the best consideration we can give it.

We have certain responsibilities. I feel that we should not let the Christmas holidays interfere with the carrying out of our duties. I feel that we have a clear-cut duty to the people whom we represent, and that we should be willing to allow ourselves to be inconvenienced, if that is necessary, in order that the people whom we represent should be represented to the best of our ability. I