

Government Orders

oranges, and I think that is something that everybody should understand so that we never have to hear this specious argument again.

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to which I would like to add without repeating anything. In fact while we are concerned about the time allocation, a second reading debate is imperfect at this point simply because all three sovereign administrations have not completed their negotiations on the parallel accords that make fundamental changes relative to the debate at second reading.

We may find ourselves in a situation where we are debating something that is incomplete and as a matter of fact is complete at this point.

• (1545)

SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr. Speaker: I am going to respond very carefully to what has been said. The facts of the matter are clear, and that is that the bill is a very important bill. All members of the House agree with that and probably the country does too.

There have been suggestions that based on another time a few years ago when I had to exercise some discretion in a difficult situation I might be able to do it again in this case. I made remarks then indicating that as a parliamentarian it was important that matters were debated for a reasonable length of time. I think that is an appropriate attitude to take.

I do though have to remind the House, and I ask the House to have some sympathy with the position of the Speaker on this, that I also have to make decisions according to the law. Sometimes it is not always understood that the Chair is constrained in what the Chair can do by the rules which this House has passed.

It is not surprising that sometimes some hon. members, or even members of the public, feel that the rules we have set for ourselves may in some cases be unreasonable or even worse. However, it is extremely important I think that the Chair be bound by those rules until the House decides to change them.

I do not want to refer to what is in a committee report that I have not yet seen as tabled in the House. The hon.

member for Winnipeg Transcona suggested—in fact he stated—that there is a committee report coming that may be tabled in the House and may be dealt with by the House that addresses this question. I think he was suggesting that maybe in that report there would be some recommendation to give the Chair more discretion than the Chair has at the moment.

There have been suggestions made that in the British House under circumstances like this the Speaker does have a discretion, but it is my understanding that discretion, that power or that right is spelled right out in the British rules. The hon. government House leader has come back and reminded us of something which is also a fact, and that is that in the British House the time for debate is generally probably more brief than in this House. However, that is a matter of argument I think and is not very much assistance one way or the other to the Chair.

The rule that I have to consider is of course Standing Order 78(3)(a) and members are familiar with it. I think that it was passed in April 1991 by this House. The government House leader is correct, as I understand it, when he says that the government has followed exactly that rule. I think he is correct in that.

I should bring to the attention of the House a ruling I made on December 9, 1992. I am going to read it because again I was faced with the same difficulty that I am faced with today. I said:

I know that the House would want me to respond to the hon. member for Kamloops and the hon. member for Cape Breton—East Richmond and the hon. member for Annapolis Valley—Hants who have raised an issue here which is, to put it simply, that it is inappropriate for the government to move now for time allocation. Some comments that I have made in the past have been quoted and I have listened very carefully to what I once said.

The difficulty it seems to me that those proponents of the motion are in is that, as the hon. House leader points out, there have been changes in the rules and the government has followed exactly the course it must follow under the present rules which govern us.

There has been some suggestion that when the present rules were passed it was without the full consent of all the members in the House and that may well have been the case. The Speaker's area of manoeuvre and acting on discretion is always somewhat circumscribed and in this case it is clearly very much constrained.

I have to advise the House—