

Inquiries Act

literally pester the government with questions. And that is a very serious matter.

The opposition parties quickly materialize the preoccupations of the people, and information is rapidly broadcasted, whether in respect of eggs, immigration regulations, or again in respect of the cow-calf prices, following the situation in the past few days in Quebec. One just has to take a close look at the questions put to the House to realize that the government is not hiding or entrenched in state secrecy.

Mr. Speaker, no one can obviously question the hon. member's good faith in introducing this bill. Keeping in mind the honesty of his intention, I should like to revert to the principle underlying this bill, namely the right of individuals to information.

However, even though I am personally convinced of the validity of this bill, I cannot subscribe to it for the reasons I have just mentioned.

Those were, Mr. Speaker, my feelings about this bill, and I thank you for letting me voice them.

● (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Alexander: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to inhibit debate on the bill but it had been brought to my attention that there was supposed to be some discussion with respect to Bill S-11, which has something to do with telephones in British Columbia. I just want it to be known there was no discussion with me or, as I understand it, with other members of my party—I am not sure about the NDP—with respect to that bill, which was supposed to come on today, rather than Bill 206.

The only discussion in which I took part was through the appropriate channels. The parliamentary secretary did indicate to me some time ago that Bill C-206 was to come up this afternoon. I do not like what has occurred over there. I was not brought into the discussions. Bill S-11 was supposed to be debated, and now we find out through the parliamentary secretary—I do not know who it was—that Bill S-11 would be postponed in favour of Bill C-206. As far as I am concerned no discussion took place. I want to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that we take a dim view of this sort of hanky-panky, if you will excuse the expression.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): On the same question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, may I say that if there was any discussion with respect to this matter it would likely have taken place with me. There were no discussions with respect to the point my hon. friend has raised. When I left the House a few moments ago I did so in the expectation that on my return we would be dealing with Bill S-11, which is extremely important to British Columbia. We had hoped that Bill S-11 would be brought forward because of its importance to the people of that province. If there were discussions, they were not through the usual channels. Perhaps they were through the most unusual channels.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Marceau (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to try to clarify the situation. I should say that the instructions I personally received as parliamentary secretary to the Min-

[*Mr. Bussières.*]

ister of Justice were to discuss bill C-206 introduced by my hon. friend from Hamilton-West (Mr. Alexander).

I have no knowledge of the discussions which might take place on the subject of Bill S-11 but I think that we shall certainly clarify the situation because I believe that the point raised appears to indicate circumstances which might seem surprising at first sight.

I presume however it will be easy to provide my colleagues with the necessary explanations so as to prove that if Bill C-206 was discussed, it is because the circumstances warranted it. But I shall undertake, together with my colleagues, to submit the objections to the parliamentary secretary who submitted the agreement in order to try to clarify the situation in the interest of all the parties in this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I confess I am taken by surprise at the suggestion there has been any hanky-panky. Someone from the government side did speak to me and indicated that the sponsor of Bill S-11 did not wish to proceed with it today. The fact that a member has a bill on the order paper does not mean he is obliged to proceed. I was told that in any case a day had been set aside for the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) for his bill. I see nothing wrong with that. I am a little surprised that the hon. members were not given the same information, but I do not think there has been any hanky-panky.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): I thank hon. members for commenting on the question of privilege. From the point of view of the Chair may I say there seems to be no way in which the Chair can be aware of the nature of consultations which may, or may not, have taken place. The responsibility of the Chair, when suggestions such as that which have been made by the parliamentary secretary are forthcoming, is to ask whether or not there is agreement. In this case there was agreement, and the Chair has no choice but to allow the debate to proceed accordingly.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I was not privy to any discussions. I am not in the same position as the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) when it comes to keeping in touch with such matters. I was advised last week that I was to speak today. Bill S-11 is, no doubt, very important, but I was always under the impression that we were to discuss Bill C-206.

The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) made some pertinent observations regarding the need for the improvement of the rules of the House as far as Private Members' Hour is concerned. Although I do not agree with him that we should be candidates for oblivion I think it might be said that some of the subjects put forward might well be consigned to oblivion, since not all of them are reasonable, or set out in a sufficiently striking manner. I do not have the experience available to the hon. member for Hamilton West and it is possible that the criticism was well taken. Maybe, though, we should be putting forward better legislation.