

Business of the House

can see the exact text of the Bill and be available to give their views and their reactions to all sides of the House.

It is for this reason we are saying that we want the usual rules of Parliament, which have worked to protect our democratic institutions for hundreds of years, to apply in this case. We are not approaching this issue on the basis of obstruction or filibuster. However, we think that the matter is serious enough that at least 24 hours, as provided by the rules of the House, should lapse before second reading debate begins. It is the Government which controls the agenda of the House. If the Government wants to call this Bill for second reading at the first opportunity presented under the rules, which I think will be tomorrow afternoon, then we will be ready to debate it.

With respect to the suggestion that the Bill might be considered in Committee of the Whole, I certainly want to consult my caucus on that. I would like to know why the Government is afraid to allow Members of the House to question witnesses directly on this measure. It has not given any explanation for proposing the departure from the normal rules of the House that Bills are studied in legislative and sometimes standing committees.

Finally, with respect to Bill C-55, which we are ready to debate today, the Government is shedding crocodile tears about the procedural amendment we made in order to show that we had serious doubts and questions about Bill C-55—

Mr. Mazankowski: You want to kill the Bill!

Mr. Gray (Windsor West):—along with dozens of other groups from across the country. If the Government had been serious about wanting to make progress on the Bill, then it would have presented it to the House on more than one occasion limited to three hours.

That Bill was introduced on May 5 and the Government did not have enough commitment, enough conviction, or enough belief in it to call it for debate until a month later. And then it called it for only one day. I say to the Government that if it was serious about its commitment to the Bill then it would have presented it to the House day after day between May 5 and June 29 until it came to a vote. The Government was in a position to do this.

We are here to do the business of the country because of your decision, Mr. Speaker. However, I do not think that we have to start off on the basis of discourtesy and inaccurate information about my carrying out an undertaking given to the Government House Leader as to when I would tell him if we would agree to suspend the ordinary rules with respect to beginning second reading. I gave that information to his Deputy at 7:30 a.m. this morning. If the two of them are not talking then that is their fault. They should not take it out on this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, just a very short point of clarification.

Some Hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Mazankowski: The Hon. Member has given us a very weak but spirited defence.

Some Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Mazankowski: My office was officially informed at 10 a.m. this morning; that is the fact.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members will understand, of course, that the exchange that is taking place on the floor of the House at the moment is a normal and appropriate kind of exchange since it gives the Government a chance to indicate to the House what its order of business will be. Of course, there are the usual comments from the appropriate representatives of the Opposition.

I would ask of all those engaged in this informative exchange to consider that the exchange should be informative. We might come to a satisfactory conclusion of it more rapidly if all of those engaged in it would use the natural self-restraint which I know they all have to avoid getting into an extended debate on extraneous matters.

The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, it is very disappointing that we have had to begin this sitting in the mood that has already developed in the House this morning. I do not think anything demonstrates more clearly the incompetence and the shambles of the Government than the way that this very important piece of legislation has been handled by it.

• (1120)

I remember distinctly that two weeks ago the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) indicated there was an emergency, a crisis in the country, and then, as he went off to attend various picnics and so on, a week went past, then another week, until finally you, Mr. Speaker, were asked to call a special sitting of the House, which you did and to which we responded.

The Government House Leader has now asked that we set aside the rules, traditions and regulations of Parliament so we could begin this discussion a little sooner than we would do so normally. We were given an unofficial draft copy of the proposed new legislation. After a cursory glance, it became clear it was a very important piece of legislation. The Government was intending to take a whole variety of new initiatives. It was felt it would serve the House, the various parties and the country as a whole to give this legislation the usual thoughtful perusal and study before the debate began.

Mrs. Maily: To take forever.