

Privilege

of any Parliament has the Speaker had to be in the chair for so many consecutive hours. Apparently that has never happened in any Parliament that we know of, so the circumstances are really unprecedented.

Mr. Nielsen: The pipeline debate.

Madam Speaker: The hon. member is referring to the pipeline debate. Not even during that period did that happen. However, there are rules regarding the question period; questions should be short, answers should be short. There are rules in the Standing Orders about the length of debate; sometimes it is 40 minutes, 30 minutes or some other length of time. There are rules which are quite strict and they are followed by this House. There are rules about the number of times a member can speak on a particular question. However, there are no rules on matters of privilege.

Therefore, I will use my discretion, in view of the unprecedented circumstances in which the House finds itself, to determine that no member will speak more than five minutes. A member must make the point to me in five minutes that he has the basis for a question of privilege; I remind members they need not debate a question of privilege but need only indicate to me that they have the basis for a question of privilege. Members may debate it once I have determined there is a *prima facie* case of privilege, but they need not do that in the course of presenting their question of privilege.

I now inform all hon. members that I will give them five minutes. I will then have to cut them off in fairness to all members. That is a discretion I am exercising because of the circumstances.

• (1600)

Mr. Nielsen: Madam Speaker, because the Standing Orders and all of our precedents make no reference whatsoever to any time limit on questions of privilege or points of order, I would hope that by now exercising a discretion to impose a stipulated time limit the Chair is not setting a precedent or altering our Standing Orders to that extent. I would have felt very much better if you had come to that conclusion and not told us anything about it. To let it stand in *Journals* as a ruling from the Chair that there is to be inserted in our Standing Orders a precedent which limits an hon. member rising on a question of privilege to five minutes, I think, is very undesirable.

I am sure you may well wish to consider that you may have misdirected yourself in the interpretation of what you have just said if members conclude that there is now and henceforth a five-minute limitation on questions of privilege. I do not think the Chair intended to alter our Standing Orders to that extent. As I say, I would have felt much happier as a member if you had come to that conclusion silently and determined that was what you were going to do, and then give a member five minutes to discuss his question.

I do not think there should be any doubt whatsoever here that our Standing Orders are in any way so altered that we are now to understand there is a specific time limit on members of

Parliament who wish to raise questions of privilege. I have raised questions of privilege over a period of time.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: Hon. members should read the rules, because we are here embarking on entirely new ground when we speak about time limitation on questions of privilege. I have raised matters that have been accepted and referred to standing committees which took a good deal longer than five minutes to develop in order to convince members of the House on all sides they were deserving of sending to standing committees.

I hope that you, Madam Speaker, would at least say from the chair, if it is your intention to deal with these questions of privilege which you consider to be overlapping a ruling you have already made by giving the hon. member a fair warning that if he cannot develop it in five minutes you will be disposed to conclude that he cannot develop it at all, that there is no practice or custom of this House, and no Standing Order or precedent, which imposes any specific time limit.

The discretion is entirely with you, Madam Speaker, as to how long you have to listen. I suggest it would be far better left at that. If you had not heard after listening for five minutes to these overlapping questions sufficient to convince you that there was a different dimension to the question of privilege or that it was a new question of privilege, then you would, of course, exercise your discretion. I certainly hope you will reaffirm that you are not injecting into our precedents a new rule, order or practice which means that in every case there is to be a five-minute time limit on questions of privilege raised by members.

Madam Speaker: There is no doubt that I did not say this would constitute a precedent, and I did not say it would apply to other questions of privilege on matters other than the one we are now discussing; that is to say, those questions of privilege which deal with the Constitution, the wording of which is similar. This certainly does not in itself change the Standing Orders, which say nothing on this matter, by the way. Since Standing Orders say nothing, somebody has to say something and I guess that is the Chair.

If the hon. member would rather I apply the five-minute limit and not warn members they will not be having a great deal of time to expose their arguments, I could have done it that way. I thought it was much fairer and easier for members if I gave them that warning. If the hon. member would rather this whole thing remain unsaid, I do not mind "unsaying" it. I am just telling the House now that I intend to use this discretion and I will be quite firm about it.

Mr. Nielsen: Madam Speaker, may I just quickly comment that the Chair has very skilfully and quickly clarified the matter to my complete satisfaction.