

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding with the consideration of private members' business, as we usually do at this time on Mondays, I would like hon. members to allow me to give my decision on a point of order raised by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) on November 4 last specifically dealing with the program and selection of parliamentary measures to be discussed during private members' hour, more especially with the notices of motions moved by hon. members to that effect.

The decision which I am about to give must, in my opinion, take our rules into account, particularly Standing Orders 18(1), 19(1) and 49(1), but it cannot ignore the recent practice which has been developed in the organization of private members' business by the government.

Besides, neither hon. members nor even the hon. member for Vaudreuil seem to be opposed to that practice, except that the latter suggests it could lead to abuses in the sense that an hon. member's proposal could be set aside and not debated at the time of his choice. So, my decision was meant to conciliate those two concerns with a concrete proposal about future practice for private members' business, a uniform and orderly way of proceeding which complies with our standing orders.

[English]

● (1702)

The point of order raised on November 7, 1977, by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) and concluded on November 28 showed that for some time the House has not been following precisely the provisions of Standing Order 18(1), Standing Order 19 and Standing Order 49 as they related to private members' business.

Standing Order 18(1) provides that private members' business be taken up according to the precedence assigned on the order paper. Standing Order 19 offers a degree of protection to notices of motions and orders not taken up when called, in that it provides that at the request of the government they may be allowed to stand and retain their precedence on the order paper. Standing Order 49 provides that a private member's notice of motion which has been called twice and not proceeded with shall be dropped. The Standing Order goes on to provide a procedure for reinstating a notice which has been dropped in that manner.

On the other hand, in recent years the House has accepted the practice whereby the government has taken a certain initiative to determine in advance the item of private members' business to be dealt with at a particular sitting. Rather than calling each item seriatim in accordance with the precedence assigned on the order paper, the Parliamentary Secretary to President of Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) has simply requested that all items preceding the previously determined item be allowed to stand at the request of the government, and sometimes by unanimous consent, or both.

Private Members' Business

As a result of the debate last week, I am satisfied that even if this practice did not conform precisely with the provisions of the relevant Standing Orders, it has gained a large degree of acceptance by the House, for two reasons. First, it gives the House advance warning of the business to be taken up during each private members' hour, and second, it protects private members' business more effectively than the Standing Orders.

At the same time, however, I considered the point made by at least two hon. members who contributed to the debate and who claimed that the practice is open to possible or apparent abuse. Certain doubts were expressed that in arranging the business for private members' hours the government might not always be guided by the priorities established on the order paper, or might not always consult all members affected or concerned.

I must say that I was struck by the effectiveness of the arguments on both sides of the question, and in making my ruling I shall try to combine the virtues of both practice and the relevant Standing Orders. I therefore hope that the House will be prepared to accept the following proposals. First, I propose that the practice developed over the last few years be continued, that is, that the government take the necessary steps to schedule in advance the business to be considered during private members' hours, with due regard to the priorities established on the order paper and through consultation, and that the House proceed directly every day at the time of private members' business to the scheduled item, standing all preceding items by unanimous consent.

Second, a member who feels that the practice has resulted in an injustice on a particular occasion and that he should have been consulted or given more advance notice may, of course, express his dissatisfaction simply by withholding the required unanimous consent. This would oblige the Chair to call seriatim, one by one, all items preceding the scheduled item.

Third, items not proceeded with when called in this manner could then be allowed to stand either at the request of the government or by unanimous consent, or they would be dropped. Of course, the necessary notation would be made in *Votes and Proceedings* and on the order paper so that we would know every day what items appearing on the order paper have been stood at the request of the government.

It seems to me that this combination of rules and practice should meet the concerns of all hon. members, and I hope the house will be prepared to work within this framework at least on an experimental basis.

[Translation]

I suggest that hon. members follow to the letter, or at least as closely as possible, this procedure proposed in my decision about notices of motions presented by hon. members, unless implementation problems arise. Therefore, it seems to me that if everything works smoothly enough it might not be necessary for the time being to revise the standing orders of the House.

[English]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I ask just one question? Putting it that way implies readiness on