

Procedure—Speaker's Ruling

evidence on a major piece of legislation and for us to ask intelligent questions and receive intelligent answers.

With regard to the ruling just made, it is important that if the Speaker is going to judge the quantity of debate as well as the quality of debate the rights of minorities, citizens and groups which have come before parliamentary committees be protected. Statistics alone do not show the full picture. It is unfortunate, but it will be necessary for the Speaker to delve into the quality of what is happening in committee sessions. He will have to consider what actually takes place when each and every witness comes before a parliamentary committee on a controversial matter. Mr. Speaker, I wish you well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. First of all, we on this side of the House wish to thank you for taking the time to give this matter thorough consideration and for giving us your ruling, which we accept as is, according to the Standing Orders. However, I would like to give you and all Members of this House our interpretation of the ruling you have just handed down.

We believe that although the Chair, in its lengthy summation, referred to the long hours spent debating Bill C-22, according to our interpretation, the Chair did not make its ruling on that basis, because when a procedural issue is raised in the House, the point is not how much time has been spent on debate but how to make a ruling that is balanced, that is satisfactory to all Members of this House and that protects them as well.

When certain debates become long and drawn out, it is a matter of discussion among members whether the debate is or is not too long, and the public may have its views on the subject as well, but I am sure that the Chair does not judge whether or not a debate has lasted too long.

The same applies to the time allocation measure the Government intends to use with respect to Bill C-22. Here again, I am sure the Chair does not judge whether, in this specific case, the use of time allocation is justified or whether or not the use of this measure has been untoward, since here again, it is a matter for the public to judge.

It may be a matter for debate between the Members of this House, but in any case, the rules for time allocation are clearly set forth in our Standing Orders and may be applied at any time. If they are used too often, it is up to the public to judge the Government's actions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me and to the Members on our side of the House at least, that today's decision, on the basis of age-old precedents used by Speakers in the United Kingdom, has expanded the powers the Chair already had. All we expect the Chair to do is ensure that these powers will be used to give equal protection to all Members of this House. As members of an Opposition that is very much in the minority, we expect and hope that these powers will be used to protect the rights of the minority in a Parliament where the majority is very much so.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make a few comments because I participated yesterday at your invitation to say a few words on the particular question.

I gather from your ruling, Mr. Speaker, that you have ruled that the situation could take place, that the motion moved by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) could stand, but that you did not want it to be a precedent. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you have made a judgment here about this particular issue. I think you have to be aware, for example, that when Bill C-22 went to the legislative committee, at the very first meeting a motion was put forward by government Members on the committee that the committee would sit five days a week, that it would meet three times a day, and that it would limit each witness to 45 minutes. They set a deadline by which time the consideration of Bill C-22 would be complete within the committee. I think you are aware of those things, Mr. Speaker. You have to be aware in making the decision.

This is why I think it is a dangerous situation where the Speaker involves himself in judging a particular Bill. While you said your ruling is not concerned with the merits of a Bill, in fact you have to be concerned with the merits of the Bill. You have to be concerned with what goes into why the Opposition is opposed to the Bill and the extent of that opposition within the House. It seems to me on the one hand that you do not want to get involved, but that on the other hand you have become involved.

I would humbly submit that in fact you have, by your ruling, picked a side. You have said that the Parliamentary Secretary's motion could stand. It is a move which has a lot of grave dangers down the road. It is unfortunate that we have moved this way, Mr. Speaker.

It seems to me that there was a previous ruling by Mr. Speaker Lamoureux that in fact that sort of motion could not stand. I think in this particular situation we have opened up a new can of worms, and it is most unfortunate that the ruling would lead to that.

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, as the official critic for Consumer and Corporate Affairs who dealt with Bill C-22, and also as one who accepted your invitation yesterday to speak to the issue at hand, I want to say very briefly that from your decision it is my understanding—and with great respect, if I am incorrect, you will correct me—that this decision in no way is a precedent for future deliberations of the House.

You have certain powers as the Speaker of the House and at the present time you are exercising those powers. Far be it from me to question whether the exercising of that power is wrong or right. You have made your decision, and we must live with that particular decision.