

Business of the House

Minister last week by letter offering co-operation so that this Bill could be brought forward as a Government Order or so that some other means be found in order to ensure that it would be debated and pass third reading before the possibility of an adjournment leading to a summer or fall election.

● (1530)

Is it now the Government's intention to expedite the Bill so that action on political rights, which the Conservative Party promised in 1984, as well as my Party and I think the Liberals, will be taken and the Bill will be passed on third reading and into the Senate prior to the adjournment which may take place at almost any time?

Mr. Speaker: Just before I call on the Parliamentary Secretary, I want to say to the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre that I apologize for not having seen him earlier. My concern was that the exchange that was taking place was going well beyond its normal purpose and I do ask the Hon. Member to accept my apologies.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, this is a subject dear to my heart. I served on the committee that dealt with the Private Members' Bill and I have great confidence that the committee worked well in a non-partisan fashion and came up with a piece of legislation that has a lot to commend itself to this House and to the nation.

I think the Government has made its position quite clear historically and perhaps I could repeat it. The Government is reluctant to intrude on the privileges of the House and of Members. There have been some very substantial advances in the handling of Private Members' Business which came about as a consequence of parliamentary reform in 1984-85. The Government would not want to be seen as dictating to the House in any fashion what the House should do about an initiative from a Member through Private Members' Hour. I think that has been explained before and the best I can do with respect to this particular intervention is to repeat it.

If the Hon. Member wants me to seek further clarification from the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski), I would be glad to do that. However, the House must remain master of its own destiny and procedures, in particular when it comes to Private Members' Hour.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I find that a little bit frustrating as well given that the Government chose not to present its own legislation over the course of the last three or four years and then let it be known it felt it was fulfilling its commitment through the Private Members' Bill which, as the Parliamentary Secretary said, was dealt with in a very responsible and co-operative way by all three Parties.

Could I have an assurance from the Parliamentary Secretary, speaking on behalf of the Government, that the Government, that is the Ministry and the Parliamentary Secretaries,

will not deny unanimous consent if the Hon. Member for Ottawa West (Mr. Daubney) or some other Member were to seek unanimous consent for this matter to come forward through whatever procedural device is required so that it can be debated and pass third reading next week? Can that assurance be given so we will not have a situation where, in its anxiety to respect Private Members' Business, the Government winds up frustrating an initiative which is important to a lot of people and which is just on the brink of being adopted by this House, being threatened only by the clock.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I thought the Hon. Member went a little outside the line of questioning when he referred to the Government not bringing forward a Bill of its own. I would like to put that in context.

The country was in a great deal of trouble in September, 1984. This Government brought forward more legislation and dealt with it more efficiently than any Parliament in the history of this country. In June, 1988, alone we faced 19 dilatory motions which resulted in the wasting of the House's time with votes and so on. Those motions were put by his Party. With a little more co-operation we might have been able to deal with even more legislation.

I just wanted that on the record. To blame the Government for not solving all the nation's problems in four years is a bit much. With a little more co-operation and fewer dilatory motions and filibusters, we could have solved a few more. However, we will go to the people and see who gets to solve them for the next four years.

On the specific comment concerning this Bill and the Government's intentions, I repeat: The Government has not interfered with Private Members' Business in this Parliament, that is, the notion of Private Members' Business. To ask whether the Government will refuse unanimous consent is to imply something that simply does not need dealing with. The Government does not intend to interfere with Private Members' Business. The nature of this House, the precedents, and principles related to Private Members' Business are very important.

Mr. Cassidy: And you are killing the Bill.

Mr. Hawkes: The Member says "You are killing the Bill". The Government will not interfere with Private Members' Business.

Mr. David Daubney (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, it might be helpful if I were to advise the House of some developments relating to this Bill which stands in my name since the matter was raised, I guess, a week ago today.

As I understand it, there have been discussions in the caucuses of all three Parties and it would appear there might very well be unanimous consent to have this matter dealt with as if it were a Government order. However, I have also had discussions today with the Government House Leader, and understanding that this is a somewhat unprecedented request,