

Private Members' Business

is not present, there are clearly two possibilities: with unanimous consent, another Member could introduce the motion and open the debate on behalf of the sponsor; assuming there is not unanimous consent, does it mean that there would be no private members' hours or is it that the time is automatically turned over to the Government for consideration of Government business?

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Attewell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on this point of order. I assume the decision will be made by the Speaker as opposed to the House Leaders. We are discussing the sequence of speakers during Private Members' Hour. I understand that speeches will continue to be 10 minutes in length and that there will be no period for questions and comments. Do you have any ideas which you would like to share with us with regard to how that process will take place?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who would like to make representations at this time on the point of order? The Hon. Member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault).

[Translation]

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker, because I do not want to take away from the time allowed for consideration of the Bill in the name of my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). After all, we share the same desk, and I want to stay on good terms with him. I simply wanted to add, while we are making representations on the subject, that there are other events that might upset our schedule. For instance, if the Chair has to call an emergency debate on a given day, this would suspend Private Members' Business, which would cause some problems if a Private Member's Bill were scheduled for consideration the same day.

Furthermore, some Members may be absent from the House, through no fault of their own, because they sit on a parliamentary committee that happens to be meeting somewhere else in Canada, and some Members may be travelling abroad as members of an official delegation. It seems to me that this calendar should be more flexible. Personally, I would suggest that when a day has been set aside for consideration of a Private Member's Bill, the Member concerned should be contacted several days in advance by House officials, to ensure that everything is in order and that the House can proceed with consideration of the Bill on the Order Paper for that date. No provision has been made for this eventuality, and I am sure that as far as the new Standing Orders are concerned, the Chair will have to provide some clarification to make the system more viable, because it is obvious that if this is not done, we will have quite a few problems.

[English]

Mr. Lewis: I would like to make another brief suggestion to the Chair. Although the Whip has made the point that this is Private Members' Hour, House Leaders invariably get seized

with some of these responsibilities. I am reluctant that you should make a final decision at this time. Neither the Whip nor the House Leader of the New Democratic Party is present, having had no notice that this argument would take place. They may wish an opportunity to participate in the discussion. I strongly suggest that this matter be reserved to give them an opportunity to participate.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is the Chair's intention to reserve its ruling on the matter. I want to thank Hon. Members who commented on the new Standing Orders, and I intend to hand down a ruling as soon as possible, in accordance with Standing Order 39(1).

Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme).

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed from Monday, December 17, 1984, consideration of the motion of Mr. Gauthier that Bill C-203, an Act to amend the Official Languages Act (supremacy of the Act) and to amend other Acts in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to a Legislative Committee.

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I am of course very flattered that my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), has asked me to speak to Bill C-203. And I feel particularly inspired because, as you see, today I am wearing this little badge commemorating the Armenian genocide, the first great holocaust. I do not intend to draw any parallels with current events, but I would like to try to draw a few lessons from past history and comment briefly on this Bill. I repeat, I am not drawing direct parallels.

In any well-ordered society, I think what seems to be most important is how one protects and respects one's minorities. If, at the time this genocide took place, minorities had been respected, we would not be commemorating today, as did so many Members from all political parties on the Hill, the history of this terrible tragedy.

Now just what does my hon. colleague's Bill involve? It is an Act to amend the Official Languages Act, since the Hon. Member is asking for the supremacy of this Act, and of course, it also amends other Acts in consequence thereof. For a better understanding of the debate that I have been following for many years, I would like to recall, for the benefit of Hon. Members, that our colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier, has always had this admirable determination to behave not as the aggressive but as the noble defender of the French fact, especially as it exists outside Quebec. And this gives us Francophone Quebecers a chance to say that the French fact is