

Point of Order—Mr. Hnatyshyn

The Chair ruled on earlier points of order, which I accept. The Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) raised the point about not counting proper and legitimate points of order in the eight hours, and I support that position on the ground that when the points of order were raised having to do with the interpretation of the rule that applies to second reading, that time should not be counted against the eight hours taken out on second reading.

On the matter of frivolous points of order mentioned by the Parliamentary Secretary, it is there that the discretion of the Chair should enter, I submit, because Hon. Members could get up on points of order and object to the clothes that some Hon. Member is wearing, or that the clocks were inaccurate, or a host of other things. It would be patently obvious that Members were trying to take up the time of the House. That is where the discretion of the Chair enters. Obviously, the Speaker should then say to the Clerk at the table that the time taken up by those kinds of frivolous points of order should be counted in the eight hours for debate. That eliminates Hon. Members who might be tempted to get on to frivolous points of order.

When a point of order is raised having to do with the interpretation of the rule that applies to the length of the debate at second reading, surely that is a legitimate concern of the Chair and the House regarding the rules and should not be counted against the time taken up for debate.

Similarly with the point made by my hon. friend from Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) in the matter of a quorum, surely 20 minutes or 25 minutes of discussion which has to do with the decorum, the order, the attendance in this House and nothing to do with an item under debate should not count in the eight hours allotted for 20-minute speeches.

I hope, Madam Speaker, you will rule that the discretion of the Chair will apply rigorously to frivolous points of order and that they should count in the eight hours for debate, but that proper points of order raised having to do with conduct, order and attendance in this House, all having to do with the rules of this House, should not be counted in the eight hours for debate on 20-minute speeches.

Madam Speaker: I just want to tell Hon. Members that we have a situation here where a ruling has already been made, but as far as I can see the ruling has been made on particular circumstances. What Members are asking me now and arguing is that the Chair should consider the broader matter of the application of those eight hours for debate. I am prepared to consider that and to rule on it later.

I think all of the arguments have been given because the last Members rising have given me the same arguments as those who spoke in the first instance. If Members agree, we will find a way out of the problem that the ruling has been made and still there is some doubt as to the application of those eight hours. We will find some way of discussing this among ourselves, and I am sure that we will find a satisfactory solution.

● (1530)

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Madam Speaker, with the greatest of respect, as one of those who was involved in this sort of thing many years ago—

Mr. Deans: Two weeks.

Mr. Lambert:—that ruling may I say, as I indicated to the Table Officers at the time, was made with indecent haste, and I say that advisedly. In that case, I would agree with the submissions made by the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) that it is always incumbent upon the Chair to determine that which is frivolous and not applicable. Points of order raised by the Opposition should not necessarily be considered frivolous. I have known, and I think you have too, Madam Speaker, and I say this with the greatest of respect, that there are points raised by Government supporters, particularly Parliamentary Secretaries who are in there as hatchet men, that are often frivolous and that there are—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Will the Hon. Member please speak to the point so that the Chair can use some of the arguments in order to reflect upon this problem. There is no point in explaining to the House that there are frivolous points of order. That is obvious to anyone who has sat in on one day of debate in the House. If the Hon. Member has new arguments to offer, the Chair will welcome them.

Mr. Lambert: Madam Speaker, it is incumbent upon Members also to reinforce certain opinions from time to time. It is not necessarily so that once an argument has been stated, to repeat it is frivolous. May I submit that in this particular instance the Chair is the final arbiter and in that particular case, unaccustomed as you may be, I am supporting you in this particular case, and may I say with the greatest of respect that I claim the right to say so.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Skelly: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the movement of the affairs of the afternoon, the House Leader for the Conservative Party raised a point concerning House business. The Hon. Member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) then rose on a point of order. I stood at the same time to ask a question about House business. I wonder if I might carry on with that.

I direct this question to the House Leader. The other day we discussed an important point concerning legislation coming before this House which affects absentee voting for individuals who are not in their own polls. As there are tens of thousands of Canadians who are disenfranchised, is it the intention of the Government to bring forward reasonably soon something to provide an absentee balloting opportunity under the Canada Elections Act in order to comply with the requirements to have that before the second sitting of this House?