

Air Transport

I wonder if the Government House Leader is denying unanimous consent and, if that is the case, does it throw the debate over to eight o'clock tonight? In the light of all these considerations, perhaps there could be consultations among the house leaders. We recognize the argument about negotiations being in progress, but now that the matter has been raised it would seem that it should be dealt with at the earliest possible moment. If there is not consent to five o'clock, it looks as though we must have the debate at six, seven or eight o'clock tonight.

I am getting lots of advice, Mr. Speaker, and it has been suggested that if we have to negotiate the matter maybe four o'clock would be even better than five.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, considering the urgency and the seriousness of the situation, I believe that there should be a debate on the matter as soon as possible. As for having this debate at five o'clock, would it not be possible, if the work of the House is expedited fairly rapidly, to have it a little earlier?

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It is obvious that there is not unanimity; therefore the Chair has to be guided by the rules. The rules do not give the Chair the authority, unless there is unanimous agreement, to set the debate for five o'clock or four o'clock. This would have to be done by agreement between the House Leaders.

I would hope that in the course of the afternoon there might be a meeting of the House Leaders to decide whether we could find a more appropriate time earlier today. However, if there is no unanimity, in view of the representations made by the Conservative House Leader I would think the debate would have to take place at eight o'clock this evening.

Mr. Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I did not understand the government House Leader to refuse his consent. I understood him merely to express a preference. Perhaps he ought to inform the House whether he refuses consent for a debate today.

Mr. Speaker: I accept the suggestion made by the hon. member for York South. Perhaps the Government House Leader would be helpful enough to comment.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, my understanding of the Standing Order is that I do not have the right to refuse consent; it is at your discretion when the debate should take place. If hon. members insist that the debate take place this afternoon at five o'clock or four o'clock, I am quite prepared to accept your decision in that regard. I am not refusing anything; I am only making it perfectly clear that negotiations are still under way and it is questionable whether the debate will be of assistance in that regard.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member well realizes that the consent I was referring to was consent to have the debate at a time other than eight o'clock. The Standing Order does not give discretion to the Speaker to set the debate, when the motion is made on a Wednesday, for any other time than eight o'clock. It is only if there were unanimous agreement by hon. members that I could dispense with that provision.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Of course hon. members will realize that the Chair, in consultation with his advisers, has spent quite a bit of time considering all aspects of the matter. I was anxious to be very fair to all hon. members in this regard and when I referred to unanimous consent I was referring to the fact that we could not have the debate at any time today other than eight o'clock without the unanimous consent of all hon. members. This is why I suggested, agreement not having been apparent, that the rule provides that the debate take place at eight o'clock. However, I would take the initiative and suggest to the House Leader that they convene. If this is the desire of all hon. members I shall take the initiative, after Routine Proceedings, to call the House Leaders to my office to see whether, in view of the urgency of the matter, we might not have the debate at four o'clock or five o'clock rather than eight o'clock.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the sensible thing to do from the government's standpoint is to provide an opportunity for the negotiations to continue. I understand they will resume at about 4.30 p.m. On that basis perhaps it may be possible to arrive at some settlement before eight o'clock. It seems to me, therefore, that eight o'clock is the sounder time, given all the circumstances involved.