

Privilege

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that we are more than happy to negotiate on a reasonable timetable for all legislation.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my friend the parliamentary secretary and while I find his comments to be interesting I do not find them terribly relevant.

I want to say right from the beginning that this is a most serious issue which the House leader for the Official Opposition has raised. The rules are there to be followed precisely and I would suggest that they were written with care. Any of us who have gone through the process of attempting to write standing orders recognizes the care and thought that goes into the wording of a particular standing order.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer to some precedents first of all. I want to go back to April 14, 1987, during the debate on Bill C-22, when the Speaker at that point made this comment:

Rules of procedure—are designed to allow the full expression of views on both sides of an issue. They provide the Opposition with a means to delay a decision. They also provide the majority with a means of limiting debate in order to arrive at a decision. This is the kind of balance essential to the procedure of a democratic assembly. Our rules were certainly never designed to permit the total frustration of one side or the other—

Mr. Speaker, I also refer to the February 7, 1990 *Hansard* at page 7948 when you made the following comments:

Notice of time allocation motions after only a few hours of debate at any stage of a Bill can also be an abuse.

• (1140)

First of all to put this into some context, and I think the record is very clear, the Conservatives have in their six years doubled the use of closure and time allocation in the whole history of Parliament since 1867. In other words, no other government has used closure and time allocation to the extent of this particular government in our entire history. We have seen in committees, in this House, as well as the other place, an abuse of the rules, tradition, custom, interpretation and convention.

My recollection is that at the most recent House leaders meeting, which took place on Tuesday afternoon, I do not recall at that time whether there was a discussion as to the limits of debate on the privatization of Petro-Canada. I do not recall that. I do, however, agree with my hon. friend, the parliamentary secretary,

that we had discussions about the debate. But I point out that we only had three speakers, the minister responsible, the critic for the Official Opposition and the critic for the New Democratic Party spoke.

When my hon. friend the parliamentary secretary says that it was his intention to discuss this with somebody but he could not find anyone to discuss it with, Mr. Speaker, I submit to you with all respect that there are a number of people within each party with whom the hon. member could have discussed this issue, for example, the critics who were speaking. The critic for the Official Opposition was not consulted. The critic for the New Democratic Party was not consulted. Then there are House leaders, then there are deputy House leaders, then there are whips and there are deputy whips.

My friend the parliamentary secretary, if he is listening, knew where the House leader of the Official Opposition was yesterday afternoon. He was in committee, as was the whip for the New Democratic Party, in a very important committee meeting, namely the meeting on the Parliament of Canada Act. He was aware of that. It was a few steps down the hallway.

When the parliamentary secretary says that he attempted to converse on this issue, I suggest that he made very little effort to converse.

Mr. Layton: Were you consulted?

Mr. Riis: We had a discussion.

Therefore, I want to reinforce that I think my colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, made the case well. We are all familiar with Standing Order 78(1), (2) and (3). When in Standing Order 78(3) it says an agreement could not be reached, surely to goodness that means that consultations or discussions of some kind would have to take place. When the parliamentary secretary now has admitted today that absolutely no conversations took place with representatives at least of the Official Opposition on this matter, it is perfectly clear.

I might say that I do not recall precise discussions of this nature, but we have had ongoing casual discussions for many days. I think what it does clarify is that if the government is going to use closure and time allocation again we had better formalize and use the formal meetings where the House leader of the government and the House leaders of the other parties meet regularly and formally to discuss the work of the House. Surely to goodness it must be at that time, or else another formally