

Private Members' Business

move a Member's motion privately, there should be something in writing to give proof positive that the Member realized he or she would not be here, intended the debate to go ahead, and gave that permission. Those are two things I would like to see considered in view of the fact that the Member who has moved this Private Members' Bill is not here today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a few minutes to speak to the point of order raised by my hon. colleague, the Deputy Government House Leader.

I agree that considering the way the order of precedence is determined now, a Bill that cannot be considered at the given time should, to a certain extent, retain its place in the order of precedence, because unlike the previous system, the order of precedence concerns not only the Members of this House but the public as well, since it is established in such a way that everyone may know the order of business in advance.

I may add that when a Member knows he cannot be in the House to debate a motion or a Bill in his name as scheduled, there must be some kind of procedure for the Member to give official notice—and not at the last minute—in writing. I do not mean this notice should include all the reasons why he cannot be here, because I don't believe in going back to when we had to bring the teacher a note if we had not done our homework the night before. I think Hon. Members should be considered as such, and if a Member knows he cannot be in the House on the agreed date, he can simply give notice, in writing, that he will not be present.

Regarding the other point raised by my hon. friend, I do not agree, and in this particular case when we cannot debate the motion presented by the Hon. Member for Hull—Aylmer (Mr. Isabelle) because he is not here, I don't think we could revert to Government Orders as the Hon. Member's interpretation of Standing Order 39(2) seems to indicate, because, Mr. Speaker, here in the House, our system is based on providing sufficient notice for Members to prepare themselves for debate.

Now if I may get back to the Government's suggestion, namely that we continue the debate on the measure which was under consideration, Bill C-196, the fact is that some of my colleagues who left the House a moment ago, just before Private Members' Business, and who wanted to take part in this debate are now on their way to their ridings and would learn on Monday that we continued the debate on this Bill.

It would be unfair, in my opinion, because they did not look at the document before us, and they thought that one hour would be set aside tonight for Private Members' Business. I should imagine they would expect Mr. Speaker to say that, if we cannot proceed with the Bill slated for debate at 4 o'clock today, the House should simply adjourn. Otherwise we would be abusing the goodwill of my colleagues who left a moment

ago, because today's Order Paper clearly indicates that we would have one hour for Private Members' Business.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 39(2) clearly states that it can be done only when it is impossible to provide the twenty-four hour notice, and such is not the case since there was a twenty-four hour notice. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, since there is nothing before the House at this time, I would urge you to adjourn the House, quite simply.

● (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) was saying that we should revert to Government Orders rather than adjourn. As I listened to some of his colleagues to my left and on his side of the House, I am sure I heard that there was no agreement with his position.

However, there are some serious problems with the rules as they deal with Private Members' Business. There have been occasions in the past when allocated Opposition Days have resulted in a Member losing his or her day to debate his or her Bill. There are times when days originally planned for Budget debate, Throne Speech debate or Opposition Day debate are changed at the last moment and we revert to Government Orders. I believe that Standing Order 39(2) was meant for those occurrences. It was not meant for the Government to have an extra hour on short notice or any notice at all on some occasions, just because a Member could not be here.

The purpose of that Standing Order is that we should not be surprised if, for some reason, we reverted to regular Government Orders on a day when we were not expecting to have a Private Members' Hour, and a Private Members' Bill could sneak in at the last moment.

I suggest that the Government would be speaking against the whole idea of parliamentary reform if it were to suggest that we should revert to Government Orders. We knew that this was a Private Members' Hour. This is Friday and a number of Members, especially those from the East or West Coast, had to go back to their ridings. If they had believed there would be another hour of debate on Government Orders many of them would have changed their travel plans and stayed here.

There is some need, as the Parliamentary Secretary said, to deal with some of the problems concerning Private Members' Business. That does not mean we should automatically revert to Government Orders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desrosiers: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve (Mr. Desrosiers) on a point of order.

Mr. Desrosiers: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the adjournment of the House.