

As honourable Members know, it has been the practice for some years that when a Minister of the Crown makes an announcement or a statement of government policy on motions a spokesman for each of the parties in opposition to the government may comment briefly.

Beauchesne refers to this practice in Citation 91 of his fourth edition. On February 1, 1954, Mr. Speaker Beaudoin stated that it was the practice of the House, when a Minister makes a statement to allow one spokesman for each opposition party to make observations, and he referred to a ruling in that regard made by his predecessor, Mr. Speaker MacDonald on June 4, 1951.

Last year, this practice was embodied in our rules and is now provisional Standing Order 15(2a), which reads as follows: On motions, as listed in section (2) of this Standing Order, a Minister of the Crown may make an announcement or a statement of government policy. Any such announcement or statement should be limited to facts which it is deemed necessary to make known to the House and should not be designed to provoke debate at this stage. A spokesman for each of the parties in opposition to the government may comment briefly, subject to the same limitation.

In 1963 an amendment was brought to the Senate and House of Commons Act, which reads as follows: There shall be paid to each Member of the House of Commons, other than the Prime Minister or the Member occupying the recognized position of Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, who is the leader of a party that has a recognized membership of twelve or more persons in the House of Commons, an allowance at the rate of four thousand dollars per annum in addition to the sessional allowance payable to such member.

It has been suggested that provisional Standing Order 15(2a) should be interpreted in the light of the amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act in 1963 and that this amendment should be a guide to the Speaker as to the procedure to be followed in the matter of comments on ministerial statements.

There is obviously some merit to this proposition. However, one should bear in mind the following principle of parliamentary procedure laid down in subsection (3) of citation 8 of Beauchesne's 4th edition: In the interpretation of the rules, or Standing Orders, the House is generally guided not so much by the literal construction of the Orders themselves, as by the consideration of what has been the practice of the House with respect to them.

We must take into consideration that after the 1963 amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act was enacted, Standing Order 15 (2a) was adopted by the House, and that in the same year such Standing Order was adopted the House accepted that the honourable Member for Red Deer be permitted to make comments on ministerial statements, although at that time he had in his party fewer members than the number provided in the amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act.

Following such precedents, I do not see how I could come to the conclusion that Standing Order 15(2a) is to be interpreted in the light of the amendment to the abovementioned Act. At the same time I do not think that it would be reasonable to conclude that independent members fall under Standing Order 15(2a). I do not think also, that the honourable Member for Kenora-Rainy River, who contributed to the discussion, comes under this category. But until such time as the House amends the Standing Order