

Point of Order—Mr. Nielsen

Mr. Deans: I ask you in future circumstances, Mr. Speaker, that that be taken into consideration and yesterday not be considered a precedent for any future action. I did consider yesterday to be most unusual, and frankly I believe it to be wrong.

I do think that in the circumstances referred to which took place in May—I remember them quite well—Madam Speaker Sauvé consulted with Members of the House who represent the various Parties. Madam Speaker Sauvé consulted, I believe, with the President of the Privy Council; I know she did with the House Leader for the Opposition and I know she consulted with me. She asked if in fact it were true that we would not be prepared to vote until the following day. I affirmed that it was true, as I believe did the House Leader for the Official Opposition and I assume the President of the Privy Council on behalf of the Government. Having ascertained that there was agreement among the Parties that the vote would not take place until the following day, she then decided to suspend the sitting until a time which the Members themselves had indicated would be a suitable time for the vote to take place. Such was not the case yesterday, Sir.

● (1540)

Mr. Pinard: You are wrong.

Mr. Deans: I am not wrong on my facts.

Mr. Pinard: That is not what we agreed to. We were ready to vote and you were not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair will have some remarks to make at the end of the Hon. Member's remarks.

Mr. Deans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am being interrupted by the President of the Privy Council. He is obviously very nervous about this situation because he very rarely interrupts. I can tell that he is not on very firm ground today.

I do not know what the outcome might have been, but I suggest that yesterday, upon ascertaining that the Government was not prepared to vote, it might have been appropriate to have spoken to the representative of each of the two other Parties. I recognize that there is no requirement to do so, but it may have been done in the interests of seeing that the sort of situation in which we find ourselves does not arise. That kind of procedure would be very helpful in the future and would make it easier for us to support measures of the type which were taken.

In my judgment, what happened yesterday was wrong for two reasons. The first reason, which I stated quite clearly, is that it creates a situation which is unfair because the same kind of rights cannot be claimed by other Members as those that were claimed on behalf of the members of the Government who did not rather than could not show up in time for work yesterday. The other reason is that it does or could create a precedent which would allow the Government to not have to answer publicly for its failure to govern properly and provide sufficient numbers of Members in their places at any point in time to sustain the Government with confidence.

This kind of situation could provide the Government with the opportunity to shift the onus of political responsibility from itself to the Speaker when answering why bells continue to ring in the House of Commons. The outcome of it could be that the Government no longer must answer for why the bells rang all night because the bells did not ring all night. The Government no longer has to answer to the public of Canada for why the business of the House of Commons was ground to a halt yesterday because the Speaker has been put in the position of answering for the Government. I think that that is a bad practice.

Therefore, Sir, I say this without reflecting in any way on the decision itself. Nothing can be done about what happened yesterday. My only concern is for what might happen tomorrow or another day. I really do feel that the outcome of the precedent of May 9, 1983, regarding Bill C-155 which has been cited, though similar and I concede the similarity, was arrived at in quite a different way.

The situation yesterday was simply that the Speaker was put in the position of saving the Government from being embarrassed. The Speaker did not do that purposely, but that is what happened. The Government failed to do what it had been warned it must do during the leadership contest. Government Members were warned that if they wanted to continue to enjoy the confidence of the House of Commons, they would have to keep their Members present and they would have to be available to vote if, as and when votes came up.

Yesterday's vote was not a snap vote or a quick decision made by the House. It was clear that the Government wanted the vote yesterday and it was clear that the vote was going to be taken yesterday. However, government back-benchers and supporters of the Government simply shirked their responsibilities and did not come to work on time. The end result of that was to establish what could well be a very bad precedent. I ask you, Sir, if you do nothing else, to make it clear that what happened yesterday was a once in a lifetime occurrence not ever to happen again.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: The Chair has already recognized the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) at some length.

Mr. Nielsen: No, Mr. Speaker, I have a correction to make. While listening to the government House Leader, I reflected upon the remarks I made toward the close of my original submission. At that time, I believe I referred to the motion of May 9, 1983, as being a dilatory motion. That was not the case; it was a substantive motion. And, indeed, the only other substantive motion that gave rise to last night's practice was the motion that we dealt with today.

I do not ask the Chair to make a decision, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I think it would be unwise to do so. I am only asking that the Chair reflect upon what happened in May, 1983, and what happened last night. Those are the only two instances of substantive motions to my knowledge that have been dealt with in that fashion. Dilatory motions have given