

so. He spoke about the principle of fairness and how important it is to respect that principle in the House of Commons. Certainly there is a belief, or a very clear understanding, on this side of the House that this motion introduced by a member of the New Democratic Party, and seconded by one of the members of the Deputy Prime Minister's own party, had associated with it the understanding that there would be no debate. That understanding, which I am given to believe was there, was broken by the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts) when he rose to speak.

In the interests of the fairness to which the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council has made such extensive reference, I am sure he intended to go on to say that it was the intention of the government to accept the proposition put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and to ensure that there would be an opportunity for one spokesman for each party in the House of Commons to speak for a limited time, ten minutes, so that there would be extended to the other parties the exact equal and fair treatment which was extended by circumstances to the Secretary of State.

In putting forward his case in the interests of fairness, I am sure the Deputy Prime Minister would not want to mar that case by establishing now an obviously unfair system where the Secretary of State, who may have been very well in breach of an agreement given to members of the House, is allowed to be the only person to speak. It was quite a reasonable request by the House leader of the New Democratic Party to ensure that other parties would be extended the principle, practice and fairness already exercised by the Secretary of State.

I am sure the Deputy Prime Minister wants to rise in his place and simply complete his remarks in order to make it clear that it will be the intention of his party, as it is the intention of my party, to agree to the position put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has invited me to reply to two points. The first point is that I regret very much, as he does, if an understanding reached among the parties has been broken. I would regret that very much and apologize for it, but I do not know whether that is so. Those involved in the discussions will be able to return to the fray tomorrow and clear that matter up.

In reply to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), in principle I would not find it very difficult to agree to, but I believe I ought not to agree to it, in order to underline the unsatisfactory operation of this standing order generally. If we are to clean up the inequity alleged today, let us clean it up for the past and for the future, and hon. members opposite can show their bona fides tomorrow when they rise under the provisions of that Standing Order.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Point of Order—Mr. Hnatyshyn

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. There has been a rather full discussion of this point this afternoon. I remind all hon. members that two applications for consideration pursuant to Standing Order 43 are being reserved under a point of order. One was raised by the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees), in which I ruled on a preliminary basis that the subject seemed to be one of general concern and not a matter of urgent and pressing necessity. Subsequent to that, a motion was raised by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert), when again I repeated the suggestion that the subject of the motion was really one of rather general concern and not a matter of urgent and pressing necessity as envisaged by the rule. Those two applications pursuant to Standing Order 43 remain under consideration as a point of order for an argument to be addressed at a later time on the use of the Standing Order.

One of the many difficulties we have faced in the application of this rule is whether or not the Chair ought to take a strong position in determining whether a matter really is one of urgent and pressing necessity. Previously when these motions were taken up after oral questions, it would seem to me that there was an open-ended period of time for consideration of them. Often there were so many that the Chair had to step in and take some measure of control of those which seemed not to be in conformity with the rule. However, when the procedures were changed to put them before the questions, there was a sort of self-limiting factor. Therefore I thought that there was much less compulsion on the Chair to intervene, because indeed they are almost always opposition applications. It is somewhat unseemly, day after day, for the Chair to be interposing itself in the face of what are consistently opposition applications—not exclusively but almost—for consideration under the rule, particularly when there was an automatic time limit on them. Therefore I have tended to be rather generous in the interpretation of what motions can be considered. However, there is a limit to that.

Two of the motions now under review should be the subject of discussion by the House. I look forward to the time, as the Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) has mentioned, when House leaders can agree and give me some advice as to a convenient time for discussing the subject matter. At that time I think we ought to continue the discussion about the difficulty we face if one of these is considered. There are real difficulties respecting the point just raised by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Also there are difficulties in knowing clearly what is going to take place, if a member gives his consent under the provisions of Standing Order 43. Certainly it is one thing for a member to be asked to give his consent to the immediate passage of a motion, if that is the case. Indeed that has certain weaknesses to it, but nevertheless it is a known quantity. It is another thing altogether to ask a member to consent to setting aside the business of the day and, on a priority basis, debate some other motion to the exclusion of and then priority ranking in the subject matter for the day. If that is the question being put—will the House put aside its other business