

*Business of the House*

● (1510)

On the question of the statement that my colleague the Minister of Veterans Affairs had intended to make today, as I said yesterday in reply to the question, I was not sure whether he would be able to make it. We did have a further extensive discussion in cabinet this morning which was not completed.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege, of which I gave Your Honour notice. Your Honour may wonder how I can see a question of privilege in this, but I remind you, sir, that you have frequently told us that a matter of privilege has to be something which interferes with a member's capacity to do his job in parliament.

It seems to me, sir, that when we have been told on four occasions that a statement was going to be made today regarding this important matter, and when this news has been spread widely across the country and those who are concerned have had their hopes raised, for the government not to keep that promise is a violation of the privileges of members of this House. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that in fact even yesterday you were of the impression that a statement was coming soon. On Wednesday, January 28, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said it would come in two weeks. The next day, on Thursday, January 29, the President of the Privy Council confirmed it. On Tuesday, February 3, the Minister of Veterans Affairs confirmed it again, and on Thursday, February 5, the President of the Privy Council confirmed it, once more, for Thursday, February 12.

Mr. Speaker, I just do not think this is the way to treat parliament. We are talking about something for which some veterans have waited over 30 years, and we have been waiting for specific action on this matter since June 12 of last year, when our committee's report was tabled, and we have had this commitment for the last two weeks that there would be a statement today.

You may ask me, sir, what redress there is if I insist that this is a question of privilege. At least there could be a reference of this matter to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where we might find out what is going on. If you find that I have a question of privilege, I would be prepared to make that motion. At any rate, Mr. Speaker, I protest most vigorously the fact that Canadian veterans who were prisoners of war in Hong Kong or in Europe are being let down as a result of there being no statement today.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I am sure the hon. member knows well—and he has very accurately described his intervention as a most vigorous protest—that his point can scarcely, by any stretch of the rules as we understand them, be accepted as a question of privilege. I am sure the hon. member and others realize the result if I were even to begin to recognize every broken promise as a question of privilege.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

[Mr. Sharp.]

**An hon. Member:** Especially by the Liberals.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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**PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS****FLYING OF UNITED STATES FLAG FROM PEACE TOWER**

**Mr. Speaker:** Before proceeding with the balance of routine proceedings, on Friday last questions were raised, particularly by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), about security implications relating to an incident involving the flag on the Peace Tower. I do not propose to make any further statement in the House, but I do want to assure hon. members that I have received a very thorough and detailed report as a result of an investigation into the incident. I have had an opportunity of discussing that report not only with the House leaders but also with the right hon. gentleman who raised the point of order. The advice I have received has been most helpful and perhaps remarkable for this chamber in that the conclusion we reached and the recommendations we considered were unanimous.

I simply want to assure all hon. members who are interested in the subject that they are welcome to discuss it with me privately. I have the report and the recommendations under review and will continue to keep the matter under very careful study. As I say, it will not be the subject matter of any further comment in the House.

**Mr. Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, I intended to rise on a question of privilege but I have changed my mind and rise instead on a point of order. It relates to the "no" voiced by someone in response to the request for unanimous consent. While I have been given to understand where that "no" came from, that is not my point. Let me point out to you, Mr. Speaker, and to hon. members of this House that the motion brought before the House by the government House leader was one that had been anticipated by many people throughout the House, including the protective staff, the cleaning staff, members of the restaurant and others, including hon. members opposite.

Far be it from me to question anyone's motives and our system allows for a dissenting voice. However, we will have many occasions involving leadership conventions and campaigns of one kind or another during which many members of the House belonging to the various parties will not be in a position to be here. While our system allows for a dissenting voice when unanimous consent is requested, I think the system must be changed in order to bring it into line with contemporary thinking. Without making any slurs in the direction of anyone whatsoever, and speaking in terms of co-operation, equity, justice and decency, I would hope that this motion can again be brought forward at eight o'clock this evening after everyone has had the opportunity of looking into the matter, at which time I hope a sense of justice, equity, decency and co-operation will prevail. If the motion is then refused, I would hope—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. In all fairness to the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) and his comment in respect of the withholding of unanimous consent,