

*Privilege—Mr. Diefenbaker*

As he has done so often in the past, the right hon. member for Prince Albert has performed a signal service to the House of Commons today by rising in his place to take exception to an automatic practice which severely limits the rights of private members of parliament in this House of Commons.

● (1612)

**Mr. Steven E. Paproski (Edmonton-Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I should just like to straighten out the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras). I do not think he was in the House when I stood up after that motion under Standing Order 43. As reported at page 3244 of *Hansard* of February 27, I said:

So there will be no misunderstanding, I said to the motion by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Lee) that this motion is not true and it should be debated.

**Mr. Thomas H. Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to President of Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief because I know the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) and others are waiting to bring forward important legislation. However, I cannot help making a few comments on this subject. I have been sitting in this House for about 12 years now and I have noticed the increasing number of motions presented under Standing Order 43. I estimate that during this present session the number of such motions has doubled or trebled. I hope the House leader for the New Democratic Party will say a few words on this aspect. He knows that, if even half these motions were accepted, the legislative calendar would be completely cluttered up. There is no way in which an already overloaded House could accept the legislation involved.

I listened to what was said by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) who made a very thoughtful contribution. I think we all recognize that backbenchers must be able to use this parliament as well as the leaders of the parties. After all, they represent a lot of people. The problem is that some of these motions under Standing Order 43 imply important changes, or amendments to government legislation—legislation which might have taken weeks to get through the House in the first place.

**An hon. Member: Months!**

**Mr. Lefebvre:** Other motions would involve major items of government expenditure. How is one to reconcile an already overloaded legislative calendar—members are saying we are already sitting too long in Ottawa, spending eight, nine or ten months here when we should be getting out in our constituencies—with the need to allow adequate time for the consideration of initiatives put forward by private members? I would suggest that the House leaders should hold discussions and maybe come up with proposals to submit to Your Honour, or to a committee of the House, designed to reconcile the legitimate rights of backbenchers on both sides of the House with the need to make progress with the legislative calendar.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** I thank the hon. member for Pontiac (Mr. Lefebvre) for his invitation—

**Mr. Howie:** It was too much for you to resist!

[Mr. Clark.]

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Even so, I rise to speak on this subject for only a few minutes. I have a hunch we are not going to solve this problem today. But it is my earnest hope that immediately after the forthcoming election, when a new parliament assembles, we shall appoint a committee which will grapple with this task. The difficulty, as I see it, is this: the government, as has been said today—and I agree—must have arrangements by which it can put its business before the House. There has to be a schedule which cannot be upset or interrupted in an unplanned way. I support that position. But it is also true that private members of the House ought to have an opportunity to present their ideas.

We have rules which are supposed to provide for this. We have private members' hours. There, however, it is not the case of somebody saying, no; it is a case of somebody on the other side saying too much until the best of ideas are talked out. I believe, there is almost as much farce connected with the private members' hour as there is with the period having to do with motions under Standing Order 43. We have developed the late show and, if I do say so myself, having had something to do with the introduction of the procedure, I think it works very well. Members get the opportunity to say more than they can in the question period, and they do get an answer. Still, we have not solved the problem of balancing the right of the government to time it can count on with the right of private members on both sides of the House to have their ideas considered.

I have served on a number of committees on procedure back in the days when there were special committees, and in more recent days when there has been a standing committee. A lot of study and a lot of research has been done but the main thrust of most of the reports which such committees produce is to limit the rights of private members and make sure that the government gets its business through. I think that is the reason why these reports do not reach the floor of the House; they are too one-sided.

It seems to me if we are to solve the difficulty of getting the proper balance between the government's rights and the rights of opposition members we shall have to find a means to get the government business through a little faster.

I say again, as I have said on other occasions, that I think the time has come for us to consider categorizing government business as "important", "routine" and "very minor". I would be quite happy to see an arrangement made whereby the opposition parties could say that they wanted, say, three or four bills open to unlimited debate but in return would be prepared to see some eight or ten unimportant bills go to committee without any debate. If we could get some method of better planning and make better use of time spent on government legislation we could then leave a little more time—whether an extra hour here or a day or so there—for private members' ideas to be considered.

I am not cynical—I have been around here too long and I love the place too well. I think it is a good place. As for motions under Standing Order 43, I realise that most of the time those I move get turned down. But there is some satisfac-