

Divorce Law Reform

This does not mean that it will take six months. But forcing us to start discussing it immediately, even if the hon. member for Ontario is ready to make his speech, I feel that would be permitting something that is not in order. It would be irregular, for example, if all at once, we interrupted consideration of the bill on second reading and immediately went into committee to study its various clauses.

Then, without wanting to interfere with the proper workings of parliament, I sincerely believe that it is only fitting that we should have the time to consider the principle of the bill since it has just been handed to us in French.

[*English*]

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has misunderstood the proposal I made. I suggested that we would not carry second reading of the bill this evening, but that we would proceed with debate and allow hon. members who are ready to speak to make their speeches. Then at a later stage, if it becomes apparent that hon. members wish to study the bill further, we would adjourn the debate and call another item of government business. In that way we will protect the rights of all hon. members; but in the meantime I think we ought to proceed with the agenda agreed upon for this evening.

Mr. Martin (Timmins): Mr. Speaker, I was quite astonished, and I must say rather disturbed by the suggestion made by the house leader a little earlier, when he said that we had lived up to the letter of the law by placing the bill in both languages in the hands of hon. members at this particular time. I do not think that is good enough, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter about which many hon. members have strong feelings, and I do not think it is good enough on such an occasion just to live up to the letter of the law.

I suggest to hon. members who speak the English language that they should stop for a moment and imagine their position where a bill is distributed in French a day or two days beforehand, and then handed to them in English just at the moment debate upon it is called. I say this is not good enough, and I am astonished that the minister would suggest it is.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, that statement is not good enough for me. I have given the explanation in French, but perhaps the hon. member did not understand it. The present state of affairs does not satisfy me either. We

have adopted this procedure in order to be accommodating to the parties in opposition. It was not our fault that the house leader of the Creditists was not present at the house leaders' meeting to put in their word. Hon. members have explained that he could not be present.

This step was taken to accommodate the opposition, and may I say there is no one in this house more sensitive than I am with regard to having bills presented in both languages at the same time. We have put particular care into the drafting of this bill as well as into the translation of it. I may say that I am caught short like some of the other French speaking members, because I had expected that I would be participating in another debate today. We had originally intended to proceed with the bill dealing with the publication of statutes, and it was at the request of the house leaders of other parties that we did not proceed in that way. It was only a matter of hours between the deliveries of the French and English copies of the bill; but the bills are now ready. I repeat that particular care has been given to the simultaneous presentation of these bills, and I will not stand for correction on this point by any hon. member.

● (8:30 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, the minister says that he has no lessons to take from anyone. He adds that it is not his fault if the Cr ditiste house leader did not attend the luncheon at the noon hour. But could he explain to me why the government house leader who is responsible for all other leaders advised us at 12.30, this afternoon, of the meeting which was to be held at 1 o'clock when all our members had gone to lunch? The Cr ditistes are therefore not to blame; it is the fault of the government house leader who does not organize himself properly so that people would be invited early enough to be able to attend the meetings of house leaders.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, last night we had decided to proceed with other questions. At the meeting of the council this morning, as usual, the government leader asked whether he could absent himself in order to consult the other party leaders.

Naturally, if there was a change of program between last night and this morning, and if this was done as a favour to the other parties, it is not surprising that we are proceeding with some precipitation.