

Routine Proceedings

The point I am making is that we ought not to endorse that type of procedure. Because of the ruling that you would be required to make, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it would be in your interest to hear thoughtful remarks by members prior to making your decision.

As my hon. friend, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has indicated, perhaps we would all do well to reflect on this over the weekend, come back on Monday, or whenever appropriate, and simply have a chance then to assist the Chair in what I submit would be the making of an historic decision to set a precedent which will judge the behaviour to be followed by committee chairs forever in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I do not think there is agreement to keep this over until Monday. Therefore, I will listen to the arguments of the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, one of the components that I wish to add to the evidence that my colleague, the hon. member for Kamloops, has presented, I do not think is a component that should be decided this afternoon. That component is that in the very committee that the member has raised these questions about, the chairman of the committee moved a motion himself in the middle of debate.

If we do not carefully deal with this process, then we could have a precedent established in the House whereby the chairperson of a committee could move motions at any single time, not wait for seconds, and rearrange the agenda by his or her intervention. We would then have the precedent that in any committee, at any time, the chairperson could just move a substantive motion, not one to adjourn or not even to ask for a motion, but just move a motion and that is it.

I do not think that we want to rush into a quick answer on this. I understand the government's need for urgency. I understand the agenda. I am not suggesting that the majority need be compromised by that urgency, as they see it. The danger and the argument that invalidates the minister's reference to Beauchesne's is that we are here at the time of report on the precipice of establishing a principle that could be referred to by succeeding Parliaments that would hamper important decisions being made properly.

To quickly move into a decision that would encompass an experience that we have had, that may or may not have been intentional, of a chairperson actually moving a motion that would become an integral part of the business could mean that the Chair itself could use that reference in the House someday and the Chair's authority could be extended to absolute rule.

I was profoundly moved by the detailed presentation by my colleague, the hon. member for Kamloops. I was very, very interested in seeing the support from the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands and the Liberal House leader. I think this kind of decision, albeit we have important matters in front of us, is the very foundation on which eastern European countries are examining parliamentary democracy.

• (1240)

These kinds of small, separate things begin to build up as precedents and erode and evaporate the power of the total House are matters of grave concern. A 48 hour delay to allow intelligent, thoughtful analysis, not only by the opposition, but by the government, is absolutely essential.

Some day the Tories may be in opposition again, and we do not want a repeat of Tories running down the centre of this Chamber yelling at the Chair with rule books in their hands because a motion overtook their reason and logic because the rule was not clear.

I am not suggesting that anybody would be as irresponsible on this side of the House and behave the way that group did at that time. But if we allow this kind of precedent to be established, then that benchmark of terrible behaviour as evidenced by the Tories could be emulated. We want to save the House from that kind of behaviour happening ever again. No one should behave like the Tories did at that time, ever again.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you, we need the 48 hour delay. We need caution, prudence, wisdom and thoughtfulness before we allow this to slip into a precedent and allow ourselves to be bound by that precedent.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, this place always needs caution, prudence and thoughtfulness. If the members of the opposition had been a little more cautious, a little more prudent and a little more thoughtful, they might have been more satisfied with the