

*Routine Proceedings*

I would just like to share with him:

—the Speaker shall have regard to the extent to which it concerns the administrative responsibilities of the government or could come within the scope of ministerial action and the Speaker also shall have regard to the probability of the matter being brought before the House within reasonable time by other means.

Those are the elements that the Speaker is directed to consider.

• (1040 )

I appreciate the intervention of the parliamentary secretary because I see again another sign of wanting to co-operate and to facilitate our desire to speak on substantive, important matters.

I do not want the hon. member opposite to leave the Chamber today with the impression that somehow we are trying to say to Mr. Speaker that we want him to have a new definition of a particular word. We do not want to get into debating the etymology of a particular word.

The hon. member, as well as the Chair, must understand that in the evolution of time what may have been an emergency a year ago may not be an emergency today. What is a genuine emergency today, three weeks from today may in fact not be. It becomes a very subjective test as opposed to an objective test.

I believe, and as my colleague alluded to earlier, the Chair has exercised prudent judgment in the past and will continue to do so. I do not think the comments of my colleague opposite should be interpreted by any member as that the Chair ought to be restricted to a strict literal interpretation of a particular word. The Speaker must have some discretion as the rules allow him to have discretion in the interpretation of that particular phrase.

**Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands):** I intend to be quite brief. I just want to rise to participate in this debate because although I have not been here as long as many of my colleagues who have spoken already, during the three years that I have sat in this Parliament I think there have been no more than five emergency debates and I am being generous using the number five.

Certainly, some of them had been arranged by agreement between the parties after refusal by the Chair to allow debate on the basis, I presume, that it was not an emergency.

In other words the rule has been interpreted in a most restrictive manner. The comments that are being made today and with which I know my colleague the parliamentary secretary agrees, indicate that this has been the case.

In my comments I want to suggest to the Chair that perhaps a fair way to look at it is to see the opportunities for members to engage in debates on public issues of urgent importance. I suggest to the Chair that they are really very restricted.

There is Question Period, obviously, which is not really intended to be a debate.

There are the Standing Order 31 statements which are again not debate, and then there is the late show. But the difficulty with the late show is that the questions raised are normally raised weeks after they have been raised in Question Period. The sense of urgency is lost in most cases and the opportunity to debate the issue on the same day it was raised in Question Period is rare. It almost never happens. It is usually deferred for weeks and weeks because of the pile up of applications waiting to be heard in that particular forum.

Therefore, the emergency debate route, Standing Order 52, is really one of the very few opportunities, aside from supply days which the opposition must give up on its own and, of course, they are not always available, on which matters of urgent public importance can be discussed in this House.

It is my submission that if Parliament is to be relevant to the people of Canada who put us here, to discuss public issues in the fullest sense, it must have discussion and debate, not to resolve anything, not to solve a problem but to discuss it and possibly to come to some resolution later. At least if there is a discussion and an airing of the grievance, an airing of the problem then that should happen under Standing Order 52.

With the changes in the rules that have meant that the business of the House is no longer set aside for the purpose of a Standing Order 52 debate, then there is no inconvenience to the government aside from the inconvenience of having a debate.

In other words, the Speaker in allowing the debate to take place is not setting aside the business of the House. We are simply adding to the hours of the sitting of the House to have that debate take place. That is a crucial