

National Defence Act Amendment

I would say that this point is as much a matter of privilege as it is one of order. If our committee system is going to work then inevitably the government will have to do better than this if it is going to ask members to make use of the proceedings of committees. The committees are emanations of this house set up by the house to examine witnesses, something which we are incapable of doing in committee of the whole house. The defence committee has done an excellent job but we want an opportunity, particularly in the light of these recent transcripts, to examine the evidence and come to a decision. Without that opportunity I do not think we can do justice to this bill and to the work that the committee did.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: There are two points raised by the hon. member for Edmonton West. The first one deals with the question of the report—

Mr. Lambert: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member is suggesting that further comments be heard from the government benches. If so I will hear them.

Mr. Lambert: I hesitate to raise one point again, Mr. Speaker, and I do so only because, unfortunately, the hon. member for Medicine Hat inadvertently misled the house when he referred to the reprinted version of Bill C-243 and said it contained a note at the top of the first right hand page that the amendments are indicated by underlining or by vertical lines. That is only as between the revised bill and the original C-243. If he will look at the original Bill C-243 he will see that the underlinings and vertical lines indicating amendments to the act are entirely different and there is absolutely no relationship among the three at all. Therefore what he had to say in this regard was quite misleading, albeit perhaps innocently.

Mr. Speaker: If I may resume the suggestion I was going to make to hon. members on the first point raised by the hon. member for Edmonton West, which deals with the report, the hon. member with support from other hon. members referred to citation 318 (1) of Beauchesne's fourth edition. I must say, with respect, that I tend to agree with the proposition advanced by the government house leader that the only requirement in that citation is that information be available for hon.

members. That suggestion did not appear to gain much support from hon. members on the opposition side when it was made, but on reflection I believe this is the purpose of this citation. As hon. members know, the amendments are now before the house in two forms, in the form of the report which was tabled and which is now officially before the house and in the form of the amended bill which has been distributed. Of course I fully recognize that distribution might be a bit late, but the report could not be distributed until it was tabled in the house. This causes difficulty but it is not really a point of order; it is really a question of convenience.

I note that the hon. member for Edmonton West during his presentation appeared to appeal to the government house leader rather than to the Chair, assuming, I would think, that this is something the government should agree to rather than for the Chair to rule that it was a valid point of order.

On the other point, the suggestion is based on the desirability of letting the order proposed for consideration this afternoon stand long enough for hon. members to familiarize themselves with the evidence. I point out to hon. members it is not for the Chair to decide whether one hour, one day, or one week is sufficient time for members to familiarize themselves with the evidence, and because of this I do not think I can interfere to ask the house not to proceed with the order of business called this afternoon by the government.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a second point of order to raise with regard to the copies of the bills which are in front of us. I have in my hand a copy of the bill which was given first reading on November 4 and I also have a copy of the bill which was given to us today, reprinted as amended and reported by the committee on national defence. I ask you, sir, which copy are we to refer to in the course of our committee study?

It says in the explanatory notes in the reprinted bill:

The amendments made in the committee on national defence are indicated by underlining and vertical lines.

Clause 2 of the bill that was given first reading on November 4 was amended in the committee on national defence. There is no vertical line to indicate the change that was made in that committee and even had there been I submit, sir, that the normal practice is