

Point of Order—Mr. Riis

Mr. Rossi:—yes, I was waiting to walk onto the floor of the House as Whip. I know the real reason, but I shall not blame the Conservatives and I shall not challenge them to tell us how many Conservatives were missing, because percentage-wise, there were a lot more missing on your side than on ours.

Mr. Speaker, that is not the point. The point is that the two or three minutes, as the Minister said . . . True, that could happen in all three parties.

I would like to submit something that may simplify the procedure and prevent the recurrence of last night's incident. It is true that, according to our procedure, the bells do not stop ringing until the Whips walk onto the floor of the House. In an emergency, it is of course possible . . . However, I think that if at a given time, the Speaker of the House says—and it is his responsibility . . . : It is now 6.18 p.m., and we were supposed to vote at 6.15 p.m.. The bells stop ringing at the Speaker's request, and Members may rise and be recognized by the Speaker, after the bells have stopped ringing. But as long as the bells keep ringing, everything is at a standstill, and no one can speak. So it might be better to say: The bells will ring for fifteen minutes, thirty minutes or thirty-two or thirty-three minutes, and then the Speaker can order the bells to stop ringing, the Whips can walk onto the floor of the House and everybody, I would imagine, would be happy. All we need is probably just a slight change in procedure.

[English]

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I simply want to add a short comment in response to the Hon. Minister's intervention. It concerns the fact that this is one of the Standing Orders that has not been abused, as he has indicated. From time to time there is accommodation made. I think it is important that we recognize that for this particular vote to which we are referring in the deliberations this morning, Members and Party Whips had three days notice. It was not as though the motion and the vote came as a surprise. When that does happen, often we end up voting very quickly and accommodations are made back and forth, as I hope they will be from now on.

Considering the advance notice that all Parties had, and the advance recognition that there would be a vote at six o'clock and the bells would ring until 6.15, I simply thought it was appropriate that we follow the rules of the House of Commons under those conditions.

Mr. Benno Friesen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis) has mentioned, there was three days notice given for this vote. The Opposition has been fighting this legislation for months now, yet, there were only 33 out to vote. I hope it may occur to him that perhaps we were trying to accommodate the Opposition to help them vote on a Bill to which they were opposed so much.

Mr. Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary—

Mr. Fulton: One hundred of your guys were missing.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary has been in the House a long time and, as all Hon. Members know, has made a very significant contribution to the matters that come before this House. However, while I very much regret that this happened last night, what is before me is a case where the bells went on for a considerable length of time. I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to address himself to that particular issue and I know all Hon. Members would want to refrain from breaching the rule, which we have for a good reason, that we do not comment on the absence or otherwise of colleagues in the House. The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not want to violate the rules of the House. It was my understanding that it was improper to refer to the absence of any particular Member, about which I have been very careful. I was simply making a comment in general about the general absence of opposition Members when they had a chance to vote.

[Translation]

Mr. Rossi: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. I cannot stand the allusions being made by the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister. If they want to know the truth, let them ask the Government Whip why he was not in the House. He knows why, and I know why, and I will say so. I know the reason.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I fully understand what the Hon. Member for Bourassa (Mr. Rossi) is saying. I also know why he is saying it. But I think that we probably do not need a lot of comments about the absence of Members, whether they belong to the Government or the Official Opposition or to the New Democratic Party.

[English]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment which has nothing to do with the presence or absence of particular Members, Members in general, or anything else of that nature.

• (1130)

With respect to the issue of a designated 15 minute or 30 minute bell, what happened last night was very dangerous, even given the fact that in the past there has been accommodation in the order of minutes between Parties, which is a kind of mutual courtesy. I hope that will continue. However, what happened last night went beyond that. I was glad that it came to an end and we finally had the vote before the person, whoever it was we were waiting for, arrived.

The fact is that if that were to happen more than once; if the House was to be put in a position where we could not have the vote until the Whips came in and the Whips were not coming in until a particular person were to arrive, we would be very soon back in the position we were when the bells rang for 16 days, or at least the possibility would be created.