

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 5, 1984

The House met at 11 a.m.

● (1110)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Speaker: Before proposing to the House the question on the Opposition motion, since today is the final allotted day, the House will go through the usual procedures to consider and dispose of the Supply Bill. In view of recent practices, do Hon. Members agree that the Supply Bill be distributed now?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: With regard to the Supply motion today, I have difficulty because there are motions standing in the name of two Hon. Members. Before making a decision, if Hon. Members wish to argue the matter to assist the Chair in making a decision, the Chair would be prepared to hear argument.

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Mr. Speaker, it almost seems to be growing into a tradition that you are put in the unfortunate position of having, on each of the allotted days, to exercise your discretion with respect to which of the two motions on the Order Paper should be selected for debate.

You will recall that last Thursday I put forward a variety of arguments in support of the contention that you exercise your authority under Standing Order 62(4)(c) to select for debate the motion then on the Order Paper standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty). As it turned out, the fact that the debate was to conclude in a vote seemed to play the critical role in helping you reach a decision. On this occasion there will be no vote on whichever motion is selected for debate. For that reason I would like briefly to review some of the statistical detail which supports the selection you made last Thursday and militates in favour of a similar decision today. That is to say, to support the discussion of the motion standing in the name of my colleague from Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman).

As I mentioned at that time, there is a fundamental difference of opinion between the NDP and the Official Opposition with respect to the manner in which the fair distribution of Opposition days may be calculated. The NDP have argued in this House that the distribution of Opposition days should be calculated on the basis of calendar years. These references

may be found at pages 29059 and 29060 of *Hansard* for November 22, 1983. Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition is of the view that Supply and not calendar years be used to determine the proper allocation of Opposition days. This seems only reasonable to us because the whole business of Supply relates to the Government's expenditure plans for the fiscal year. Surely if Opposition days are to relate to Supply, their distribution should also relate to the fiscal year.

Nevertheless, the NDP were successful on November 22 last in convincing the occupant of the chair that the protection of the rights of the minority in the House depended upon selecting the NDP motion. Thus the distribution of days was revised to conform to the calendar year distribution as suggested by the NDP. Since that time we have taken particular care to ensure that the distribution of Opposition days conform not only to the optimal distribution of days by calendar year, but also to the Supply year as well. With those objectives in mind the NDP have been given five of the 18 Opposition days held since the end of the fall semester. This works out to roughly 28 per cent of the Opposition days, although NDP Members—

● (1115)

Mr. Speaker: May I interrupt the Hon. Member to check whether it is five or six. Would the Hon. Member have a count to verify this?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that it is five out of the 18 days. If it is six, that just enhances my argument, of course. Using my figures it would be 28 per cent of the Opposition days although NDP members constitute only 25 per cent of all those who sit on this side in opposition in the House of Commons. If you were to select the motion of the Hon. Member for Fraser Valley West for debate today, the percentage distribution of those days would adjust so that the NDP would have taken 26.3 per cent of the Opposition days since the beginning of the year, or a higher percentage if they have indeed had six Opposition days.

Lest there be any suspicion that the argument with respect to the distribution of days by calendar year is being used to conceal an inequitable distribution of days by Supply year, I would like to point out that over the four Supply years which have taken place since the beginning of this Parliament, the NDP received 26 of the 100 Opposition days which were held in that period. Seven of these motions have come to a vote. In other words, the NDP constitute only 25 per cent of all Opposition members, but have received 26 per cent of the Opposition days and over 29 per cent of the motions filed under Standing Order 62(9).

It is important fully to understand this percentage distribution of days, if only because it seems to be the only point of