

tional Revenue. If he feels there is a need to inform Canadians about Revenue Canada, and he is spending \$300,000 on an advertising program—

Mr. Beatty: A week.

Miss Carney:—why is the Minister not spending that money up-grading the people who answer the telephones in Revenue Canada, considering that a Toronto newspaper found 40 per cent of them this week could not even answer the questions? Why is the Minister not using that money for training instead of advertising?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform the Hon. Member that we spend a lot more than that on training people who answer the phone, not only money but time, and a staff of experts is available to the employees who answer calls from the public.

I can inform the Hon. Member that this training is not given two minutes before they start their duties. Training is on a daily and weekly basis, with meetings with supervisors, when they review the type of questions they have been asked and look at more satisfactory ways of answering taxpayers.

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● (1200)

[English]

PROCEDURE AND ORGANIZATION

RINGING OF DIVISION BELLS—REFLECTIONS OF MR. SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: I am now ready to share with the House my reflections arising out of the events of Monday and Tuesday, March 19 and March 20, reflections, I may say, which have been reinforced by the events of Wednesday and Thursday, March 28 and March 29.

Ever since the occasion in March, 1982, when the division bells were allowed to ring indefinitely, the House has been confronted with a problem which it has yet to resolve. The situation which occurred when the bells continued to ring for 15 days was unprecedented in our practice and the Chair was faced with a dilemma. Had the Speaker ordered the bells to stop, she would have been accused of partisanship on behalf of the Government. By not stopping the bells she was exposed to criticism for failing in her duty to ensure that the House was able to function. It was a classic "no win" situation.

When the deadlock was finally resolved by the Parties, Madam Speaker Sauvé made a statement in which she underlined the agonizing conflict of duty with which the Chair was confronted. She quoted the well known parliamentary authority, Redlich, who wrote:

Protection of a majority against obstruction and protection of a minority against oppression are both alike functions of the Chair. It is hardly too much to say that they exhaust the duties of the high office held by the impartial guardian of parliamentary law.

[Translation]

She spoke of the impossibility of reconciling these two functions in the face of the situation in which she found herself. She pointed out that the House had a responsibility to give guidance to the Chair and I should like to quote some of her words:

The Speaker is the guardian of the rules of the House. He does not invent them. It is up to the House to decide what changes are necessary. I merely point out that there is a problem. In the meantime, the Chair will continue to be vulnerable until the House provides it with guidelines which would lead to settled practices regarding those very difficult and highly controversial questions, where the rules and practices appear to be less than satisfactory.

[English]

She concluded her statement by stating:

It is my hope that such a situation will never again occur in this House. However, should it occur again, the Chair, unless it is provided with firm guidelines, would need to consider its course of action with very great care under the new circumstances. I trust that in the overriding interests of this honourable institution, the House will take steps to make known its will as to how the Chair should act before any such situation occurs again.

Shortly after the bells crisis, a special committee was appointed to consider the reform of the procedure of the House. A number of changes recommended by the committee were adopted on a provisional basis. It is within the framework of these changes that the House is currently operating. Many of us hope that the committee would address the problem of the bells and bring in a recommendation which the House might have found acceptable. However, it did not do so.

In the absence of any guidelines, certain initiatives have been taken by the Chair. Dilatory motions have been declared to have lapsed if not voted on by the hour of automatic adjournment.

On three occasions, when the question before the House has been a substantive one, the bells have been suspended overnight and have continued the following day. This practice in no way interferes with the indefinite ringing of the bells when substantive questions are before the House. It came about as a result of the humane considerations referred to by the Hon. President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) when speaking to the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) on March 20.

The Chair was also influenced by the need to maintain the dignity of the House. The spectacle of a lone occupant of the chair and a gowned clerk, during the fullness of the night in an otherwise empty House, the prisoners of a theoretical assumption that the House might be ready to vote at any time appeared to the Chair to be absurd.

I should now like to deal with the arguments raised by the three House Leaders when they spoke on this matter on March 20. The Hon. Member for Yukon asserted that the Chair exceeded its authority in suspending the sitting and the bells. He said:

The suspending of a sitting overnight in the midst of a division is almost without precedent.

There was, of course, only one such precedent, on May 9, 1983. We now have another resulting from the bell which