

Committee Procedure

House leader. The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) has made a good point with regard to the proper consideration by this House of Bill C-83 and Bill C-84. As he pointed out, the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) in his speech the other night said it was part of one package. On that ground the Chair ought to consider the situation very carefully. The government House leader has a particular responsibility to consider the operation of parliament.

There is another side to this debate which is also important. One of the two bills before parliament, C-84, is a bill on which there will be a free vote and for my argument I am overlooking the question asked today by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt). I presume that bill will not be discussed in caucus. It is the kind of bill on which each member will make up his or her own mind on one basis or another and, on that basis, decide how to represent his or her constituents.

In that context, it is important that every member of this House of Commons be at least afforded the opportunity of coming into this Chamber and listening to the debate on Bill C-84. This debate, perhaps more than any other, does not advance a party point of view but involves persuasion. All members must admit there is an atmosphere about this place which one cannot capture. There can be nuances to argument that one cannot capture from the pages of *Hansard*. In addition to what the hon. member for Calgary North has said, even though there are some difficulties in the committee system, I respectfully suggest that these difficulties are not insurmountable for the government. They ought to be surmounted so that members who are being asked to reach a difficult decision with regard to Bill C-84 should have an opportunity of listening to the debate.

● (1510)

I admit we are restricted by the fact that committees do sit while the House is sitting, but surely those members who are concerned with one part of the whole peace and security package in a committee ought not to be deprived of the opportunity of participating in the debate in the House. To my mind it is incongruous that the present situation should continue to exist.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the House leader, to take note of the fact that the bills, in their essence, are completely different from each other and that special consideration is due to members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs in this particular case, not only because of what the hon. member for Calgary North has said but by reason of the nature of those two bills.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order, as a member of the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, in support of what has just been said by my House leader and by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams). The difficulty I experience, as one member of

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

the House, is this: my constituents expect me to participate in the work of parliament and they have shown a special interest in Bill C-83, as is exemplified by the amount of mail I have received with regard to it. As a consequence I should be participating in the work of the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs during its clause by clause consideration of the bill in a meaningful way, by contributing to the discussion and moving amendments.

At the same time my constituents expect me to be in the House to take part in the debate on Bill C-84, another important bill in which they are taking great interest, as are all the people of Canada. They expect me as their representative to take part in that important debate so that I can make up my own mind and put forward the views of my constituents if it happens that my views do not coincide with the majority of theirs.

My House leader made the point well when he said there had been no input from caucus on this issue and presumably, since there is to be a free vote, this is the case on the other side of the House as well. Consequently we are all expected to take part in the debate and listen to the arguments expressed by other hon. members, and then cast our votes according to the dictates of our consciences so as to best serve the interests of our constituencies and our country. But we are denied the right to do this as a result of the management of the business of the House by the government House leader. He has taken what has been a package, what was presented to the House as a package, and split the package, and now he tries to split the House, something he cannot do.

Another point I should like to make has to do with the scheduling of committees. It is very relevant to my argument. Tomorrow, for example, while the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs is sitting, four other committees will be meeting at the same time to examine estimates—Labour and Manpower, Miscellaneous Estimates, Agriculture, and National Resources and Public Works. My hon. friend reminds me that the National Capital Commission committee will also be meeting at the same time.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, we are expected to take part in the clause by clause examination of Bill C-83 in the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. We are expected to participate, also, in the extremely important debate in the House on Bill C-84. Third, and not necessarily in this order of importance, we are expected to carry out our principal responsibility in this place, that is, the voting of supply. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how can we carry out this responsibility, the examination of estimates and, dependent upon that, the voting of supply, when there are ten committee meetings taking place tomorrow, beginning at 9.30 in the morning and carrying on past 8 p.m. at night? I ask the government House leader does he take parliament seriously, or does he think this is a joke? I can assure the House leader that we look upon the examination of Bill C-83 and upon the debate in connection with Bill C-84 as being of the utmost importance. I also say we have a responsibility to examine all the estimates, and I submit he is denying us that right by having 14 committee sittings on the same day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I rise on the same point of order, Mr. Speaker. Because my hon. friends have put our case in