

Privilege

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the real intent here, the opposition has succeeded in wasting 52 minutes of the House's time. I will not waste a lot of time, but I think it is useful to put the events of Friday in a little perspective. Indeed it was an allotted day. Indeed it was an opposition day. It started at ten o'clock on Friday with an hour's debate interrupted for Question Period and Routine Proceedings.

At twelve o'clock, the New Democratic Party raised a point of order to which the Chair ruled early, a point of order that had no merit, as the Chair pointed out, but a point of order through which its members managed to waste two hours of time. It being an opposition day, there was some concern expressed about the fact that two hours out of a four-hour debate on Friday basically halved the time allotted to the Liberal Party for its very important motion.

We discussed on this side whether in fact we might extend hours to recover those two hours for the Liberal Party. In fact, it turned out that the New Democratic Party extended the hours, something that we could have stopped with 15 members and we did not. Given that two hours of the Liberal's opposition day was wasted by the New Democrats, recovering those two hours from three o'clock until five o'clock seemed appropriate.

At five o'clock, two hours after the normal hour of adjournment, when people have made other plans to go home, including the staff here and so on, my colleague, the Whip, raised a quorum count. I heard earlier about how vitally committed and involved all opposition were in this issue, yet they did not have sufficient members here to reflect that vitality. I heard my colleague, the member for Ottawa—Vanier, say that he wants a little common sense here in terms of what approach. Let us look at what happened on Friday. The Liberal Party, which was due four hours of debate on its motion, received four hours of debate on its motion. The effect of having the two hours at the end rather than at the appropriate time made a little difference: there would be a little more overtime, a little more costly for the taxpayers to handle it that way but perhaps not unreasonable for the Liberal Party to get what was due it in view of the games the New Democratic Party was playing.

To suggest somehow that a great robbery was committed flies in the face of what happened. The opposition was due four hours of debate on a non-votable motion. That is exactly what it received. There was no one deprived of any right whatsoever, except perhaps some members of the staff were deprived of the right to complete their day a little earlier than they did. Even then approaches were made to ask how long did they want to debate. The leader of the New Democratic Party said that they had several speakers who were anxious, implying that they would run until exhaustion.

I maintain that the actions of our Whip were in fact very responsible. The day came out as it was planned. There were four hours of debate on the motion of the Liberal Party. It was terminated at a reasonable time so that the overtime bill of the House of Commons was not too extensive and the staff and members were able to go home.

Now the question comes. That is common sense, common sense says you look at it: no damage was done to anybody. In fact people were made whole as a result of the damage potentially inflicted on that day by the New Democratic Party point of order.

However, let us look in fact at the substance in terms of precedents. Beauchesne's sixth edition, citation 287, reflects the Bourinot's citation that the House leader of the Liberal Party raised and refers to a quorum call by stating:

A "count-out" will always supersede any question that is before the House. If an Order of the Day for the reading or committal of a bill be under consideration at the time, and there is no quorum present, the House must be asked at a subsequent sitting to revive the question that may have lapsed in the way.

It is very clear. The precedent is there. It is no big deal.

Mr. Milliken: This is not a bill. That says "a bill".

Mr. Andre: Or motion.

Mr. Milliken: A bill. Read it.

Mr. Andre: It is the same thing.

Mr. Gauthier: No, there is a difference.

Mr. Andre: It is the same thing, and at the point of motions today I intend to move in fact that the order for consideration of business supply be reinstated, as provided in the Standing Orders. Nothing has happened to the government of this country. No one has been denied a cheque. Nothing has happened. On Friday, after a four-hour opposition day, terminated by quorum because the New Democrats would not act responsibly and