

Private Members' Business

But then it says further on that if the motion is not called by the government it may, however, be renewed, but renewed, as I understand it, losing its rank, renewed but dropping to the bottom of the list. So, of course, the hon. member may have it renewed but he cannot hope to have it discussed because the standing orders say that private members' business will be taken up between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Fridays. The consideration of private members' business is suspended on Tuesdays and Mondays when it has reached a total of 40 times in a session. This means that if the list contains more than 40 items then there are many motions on the order paper which do not have any chance of being discussed. This is limited by a standing order.

Mr. Speaker, the interpretation of Standing Order 18 that you quoted earlier is something extremely important. The meaning of that Standing Order 18 must be looked into. All items standing on the orders of the day, except government orders, shall be taken up according to the precedence assigned to each on the order paper. Government orders shall be called and considered in such a sequence as the government determines. When the government stands a motion does it become a government order afterwards which could be called at its will? It is a matter of interpretation. I would surely like to be enlightened on that. If the government then has the privilege to call this motion as if it were a government motion, any protection that we have comes too late because it is certain that the government will eventually want to dispose of the motion.

● (2237)

In any case, to summarize, I consider that this matter should be examined more closely. We have a Committee on Procedure and Organization. It should be asked to deal with those matters instead of waiting for two or three years before presenting its report. We should go really to the bottom of things so that, when we have a sensitive situation like the one we had last week, we should truly know where to go. There are quite enough unclear issues for us to at least put things in perspective when we can do so.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, if you had really wanted to apply our standing orders to the letter last week, there would have been some embarrassment because the parliamentary secretary had not made the reservation on behalf of the government in time. Such a distraction can happen to anyone. I do not want to single out the parliamentary secretary who is now sitting in his place. This is not at all what I want to do, but I want to say that our procedure should be more specific. This is why I suggest that the Committee on Procedure and Organization be asked to consider this matter carefully so as to protect the rights of members of parliament because this is why we are elected, to represent the people. Many motions and private bills have been put on the order paper at the request of the voters, of the people.

As a matter of fact, in my mail this afternoon I had a long letter from a Quebec City resident who asked me to make arrangements to have a motion for setting a specific date for elections discussed in the House. In his opinion, this can be done any time without any problem. But we who sit in this House know that it is not so easy to have the House of Commons discuss such a question. However he is right to say that this is a very important matter. Quite recently the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) proposed a very important motion about which questions are asked nearly every day. It concerns pensions at the age of 60. The people are concerned about it.

● (2242)

And if hon. members were not allowed to deal with these motions, the people who have elected us to represent them would not be satisfied with us and could certainly wonder what we are doing in the House. So, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that since our debates are being televised, maybe the law clerk could explain to the viewers some of the finer points of our procedure. That is something which was asked of me last weekend. People wonder why this, why that, why such and such adjournment motion. People are asking us a great many questions. Therefore, if we want to keep the Canadian public interested, we shall have to shed light on these matters, make sure that they understand better and, what is more, co-operate more effectively in the administration of our country.

Having enunciated my suggestion, I need not repeat it, but I feel that in the meantime, we should as well keep our old rule book.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I thank all hon. members for their constructive remarks. If I begin by the last remark by the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert), I think that indeed the matter will have to be deferred, at some time or other, to the Committee on Procedure and Organization possibly to come to a review of the standing orders, and perhaps to some clarification. But before arriving at this point and perhaps before correcting the few contradictions which are to be read in the present standing orders, we should perhaps know what hon. members want.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) has questioned, I think, the intervention of the government in the standing of business, and he went as far as to suggest giving some right to the individual hon. member concerned for him alone to make a request to have his order stood. I do not think this is covered by the rule as it is now, but I think, if I understand the hon. member well, his concern is that when the government—and I suppose the same thing applies to the remarks of the hon. member for Bellechasse—makes a request to stand a motion, no hon. member has a guarantee that the member presenting the motion, or in whose name it stands, has been consulted or has given his authorization. This is one of the considerations.