

I gather that they are in agreement with the government on that particular point, and I believe that they are also in agreement with the government in the view that at a time when several members of this House of Commons are on active service and consequently would not be in a position to attend here or to serve on the committee which would have to do with the work of redistribution, this would not be an opportune time for the house to attempt redistribution.

I rise at the moment, however, more particularly to call the attention of hon. members to certain rules which govern procedure in the house. The reference made by the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party to the desirability of amending the British North America Act in a way which would do away with the act altogether and allow this country to have its own constitution indicates how many subjects it might be possible to discuss at this time on a motion brought forward in reference to the amending of the British North America Act in only one particular. I have received an intimation that it is possible amendments may be moved to the motion which is now before the house with a view to discussing other matters which are not immediately related to the question now before the Chair. I believe that members of the house generally would not wish to have a discussion on matters that are not immediately relevant. We have had a long session, there is still a very considerable programme to be overtaken; and it is, I believe, in every way advisable that we should proceed as expeditiously as possible with the measures that are on the order paper. I have no desire to restrict or narrow discussion on the question before the house, but I do feel it is desirable to avoid unnecessary discussion or discussion related to subjects other than that which is immediately set forth in the motion before us. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I intend to move at once that this question be now put. Standing order 48, under the heading "Privileged Motions", reads:

When a question is under debate no motion is received unless to amend it; to postpone it to a day certain; for the previous question; for reading the orders of the day; for proceeding to another order; to adjourn the debate; or for the adjournment of the house.

My motion is for the previous question.

Standing order 55, which refers particularly to the previous question, reads as follows:

The previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main question, and shall be in the following words "that this question be now put". If the previous question be resolved in the affirmative, the original question is to be put forthwith without any amendment or debate.

Hon. members will see that my motion does not preclude full debate on the motion before the house; it does preclude the consideration of any amendment to that motion. I submit it is in the interest of hon. members of the house and of the country at this time of war that the debate should be confined to the one motion before the house, and I move accordingly.

Mr. SPEAKER: The Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) moves, seconded by the Minister of Mines and Resources (Mr. Crerar) that the question be now put.

Mr. E. G. HANSELL (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, before the question is put, may I say I am sorry the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) did not give this group an opportunity to express itself upon the resolution.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend is not deprived of doing so. Every member in the house has the fullest opportunity to discuss the motion, on the order paper, but no member is at liberty to move an amendment to the motion.

Mr. NEILL: But the very terms of the proposed amendment of the Prime Minister preclude any further discussion in the house. If the question be now put, then no one can debate the original motion.

Mr. SPEAKER: I refer hon. members to Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, third edition, in which standing order 55 provides:

The previous question, until it is decided, shall preclude all amendment of the main question, and shall be in the following words, "that this question be now put". If the previous question be resolved in the affirmative, the original question is to be put forthwith without any amendment or debate.

The previous question is moved when the original question is under debate. Paragraph 327 of the third edition states:

The previous question is moved when the original question is under debate, in order to force a direct vote on the original question before an amendment is proposed. The form of the motion is "that the question be now put". Once it is proposed, the debate may continue on the original question. The previous question cannot be amended but it may itself be superseded by a motion for adjournment. The previous question cannot be moved upon an amendment though, after an amendment has been agreed to, the previous question can be put on the original motion as amended.

Therefore a discussion can take place now on the original motion. Then the question is put, and if carried in the affirmative the original motion must then be moved, without debate.