

Business of the House

Before suggesting to the House that this procedure and practice be followed again this year I should like to make a few references to certain procedures which seem to be evolving in connection with such private members' bills. In the first instance, the number of bills being introduced far exceeds the number of opportunities that will be provided for the consideration of such bills in this session. In like manner, some members have given notice of several or more bills. Indeed, in one case an hon. member has filed notice of more than 40 private members' bills in his name. I would not like to suggest in any way that it is not the hon. member's right to do so. The rules as they stand at present allow any hon. member to propose for consideration by the House any number of private bills. Inevitably, however, the bills proposed by that hon. member will take up a disproportionate share of the time allotted for the consideration of private members' bills.

Another related factor is that a great number of bills that cannot be reached at this session will be printed at considerable cost. It is for hon. members to determine whether it is advisable to continue the practice whereby so many bills receive the usual pro forma first reading and are ordered for printing at substantial expense when the Standing Orders will prevent most of these bills from ever being considered in the House.

It is obvious that in many cases there is much value in having private bills circulated and considered by hon. members of the House and by interested members of the public. There are arguments on both sides of the question. But the fact remains that from year to year there is an ever-increasing proportion of private bills proposed by hon. members that will never come before the House for consideration and debate.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization may wish to have a look at the situation to determine whether a more equitable procedure can be devised for the consideration of such bills.

Another aspect of the matter is that there is an increasing tendency to include money provisions in private members' bills. Hon. members know that the time-honoured practice has been to include such proposals in the form of a private member's motion rather than in a bill.

In many cases in the past, in order to meet the convenience of hon. members the consideration of the second reading of such bills was entered upon. It seems to the Chair that this procedure is not good parliamentary practice.

May I enumerate a number of bills which, at first glance, appear to include money provisions. Initially, there is a bill entitled "an Act respecting the employment of women in federal jurisdiction before and after childbirth", standing in the name of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway. Then there is an act to amend the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act and also an act to amend the BNA Acts 1867 to 1965. Then there is a bill to amend the Canada Pension Plan, standing in the name of the hon. member for Hillsborough; a bill to establish a

Newfoundland tunnel authority, standing in the name of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe; a bill to amend the Atlantic Freight Assistance Act, standing in the name of the hon. member for Moncton; a bill respecting fares for disabled persons on federal modes of transport, standing in the name of the hon. member for Oxford; a bill to amend the National Housing Act, standing in the name of the hon. member for Hamilton West, and a bill to provide for the constitution of a federal transport commission of inquiry, standing in the name of the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East. There are many other such bills. I am sure hon. members would not want me to go through the whole list, so I will stop my enumeration there.

The Chair considers that in the drafting of bills more care should be exercised to ensure that financial provisions are not included in such bills. When the aforementioned bills and any others which, on closer examination, appear to contain financial provisions are called for debate, I propose to examine the question of whether or not such bills are in order from a procedural standpoint. At that time hon. members who have sponsored these bills will have an opportunity to satisfy the Chair that the bills are in order from such standpoint before proceeding to substantive argument on the merits of the bills.

I apologize to hon. members for taking up so much of their time but this is a matter which, as they know, has given some cause for worry to a number of hon. members interested in the procedural aspects of the matter.

● (11:20 a.m.)

Finally, may I refer to the practice which has been developing in some cases of including as purported explanatory notes to the provisions of such bills that are, in reality, matters of debate. In one instance there is included as an explanatory note a statement of some length made on April 20, 1970, by the occupant of the Chair. That statement may have a place in our proceedings but it does not strike me as providing an explanation of any provision of the bill to which it refers. In another case there is an interesting quotation of six or more paragraphs from a statement made in 1796 by George Washington. With all due respect to that late, great and honoured gentleman, I suggest that the inclusion of such material under the guise of an explanatory note offends the rules of the House.

I conclude by asking the House whether there is unanimous consent to an order that all private members' bills listed on today's order paper be deemed to have been introduced, given first reading, ordered to be printed and allowed to stand for second reading at the next sitting of the House subject, of course, to subsequent examination as to the regularity of each bill? Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[Mr. Speaker.]