

Point of Order—Mr. Riis

Therefore, it is more than a matter of orderly business. If the Government is to be allowed additional time at the end of 15 minutes through the device of not having the Whip available, then similar consideration might be asked for in the future by the Official Opposition. If that is the way in which the situation devolves, what happens to the rule that calls for the vote to be put after 15 minutes?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. Actually, I tried to raise this point of order yesterday afternoon, after the bells had rung for more than fifteen minutes. However, I was unable to do so because we were in a vacuum. The bells were ringing and no one could speak in the House.

The point I want to make is that in Standing Order 13(2) which is very clear, we read the following:

(2) When, under the provisions of any Standing Order or other Order of this House, the Speaker has interrupted any proceeding for the purpose of putting forthwith the question on any business then before the House, the bells to call in the Members shall be sounded for not more than fifteen minutes.

The first question that comes to mind is why the bells had not stopped, since they were supposed to stop. The Standing Orders are clear. I may remind Hon. Members that before the Standing Orders were amended, the bells could go on ringing for an indefinite period. There were times when opposition parties took advantage of this fact and prolonged the ringing of the bells to make a certain point, and this has occasionally created a chaotic political situation in this country.

When our Party negotiated with the Government to amend the Standing Orders of the House, we agreed to a time limit on the ringing of the bells, fully realizing that this would put certain constraints on an opposition party that would no longer have the means of using the bells to get its point across. Since we as the Opposition Party agreed to discipline ourselves and to change the Standing Orders, thus losing a mechanism, in fact a weapon, it could otherwise have used in the House, I think it is only fair that the Government should observe the Standing Orders, since they apply to both the Government and the Opposition.

I realize that according to our parliamentary tradition, the bell stops ringing when the Whips enter side by side and walk onto the floor of the House.

However, the Standing Order I read earlier is quite clear: The bells shall ring for not more than fifteen minutes.

I think that, eventually, the Chair should make a statement in the House—at least that is what I would suggest—to clarify the interpretation of this Standing Order so that all Members know what the situation is. That is what I would urge you to do, Mr. Speaker.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague raising this point because I think it is fair to say that this is one of the rules of the House which works both ways at various times. I am aware, without being able to state exactly on what dates it happened, that there have been accommodations given by the Government to the opposition Parties with respect to Members who were having difficulty arriving for a vote, when perhaps for the Government's purpose we would have appreciated a 15-minute bell in order to go to caucus. However, we allowed for a half hour bell so that planes could arrive and so on.

I think it is fair to say that this is a rule that has not been abused by either the opposition Parties or the Government in the past. I also submit that it was not abused last evening.

There were many Members who showed up for the vote. It would be partisan of me to comment that there was a noticeable absence of opposition Members from Montreal, so I will not do that.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Order.

Mr. Lewis: Everyone knows the interest that Bill C-22 had in the Montreal area. I compliment my friend—

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Minister, of course, has alluded to what he was not going to do. Having chosen the words he did immediately after having alluded to that, he did not have to allude to what he was not going to do. The Hon. Minister will, of course, keep that in mind.

Mr. Lewis: Thank you for dispelling any illusions that you are not following my allusions.

Having said that, I take the point that the opposition Members have made. However, it is not a rule that has been abused to the best of my knowledge. There will be occasions when this happens in the future and accommodations are asked for by all Parties of the House. That happened yesterday evening. I take the comments of my colleagues to heart and hope that in the future when this happens we can settle it among the Members of the House without lengthy discussions on the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Carlo Rossi (Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, I agree with what the Minister said about waiting for two or three minutes. However, I totally disagree with his allusions that some Liberal Members from Montreal may have stayed away from the House.

At least I will have the decency to refrain from telling him the real reason—that the minutes—

An Hon. Member: You know the reason?