

Now, what about the character and importance of this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I read all that.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Starting with the Carter report about nine years ago, followed by the white paper which involved more informed public discussion than probably any other measure in this Parliament or, indeed, as far as I can recall in active public life—

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That bill didn't.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I suggest that because of the far reaching nature of this particular measure, any reasoned amendment, if it were permitted and carried, would have far greater impact than the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was willing to concede.

May I say one thing further, Mr. Speaker, on the general subject of relevancy and the responsibility for introducing business. I suggest to Your Honour that the government has the responsibility under our parliamentary system to bring the business before the House.

Mr. Fairweather: That is one of our problems.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): And it is going to remain one of your problems. That being so, Parliament has held throughout the years that in order to keep the discussion pertinent and relevant, amendments must stay within the four corners of the business of the House. That is my argument, Your Honour.

Mr. Speaker: I thank hon. members for the advice and guidance they have provided the Chair in relation to the very difficult ruling which has to be made on the procedural acceptability of the amendment moved by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert).

Hon. members have recognized that it is difficult for the Chair to rule on the procedural aspect of reasoned amendments. Hon. members who have participated in this very interesting procedural debate have suggested, or some of them have, that it is becoming increasingly difficult to propose acceptable reasoned amendments. I cannot agree entirely with this suggestion. If hon. members will look into the records of our House of Commons they will note that during most of our parliamentary history so-called reasoned amendments have been proposed on rare occasions only. It seems that only during the last few years have members started to use this device, that is, the device of reasoned amendment, on second or third reading of bills.

I agree that more such amendments have been ruled out of order in recent years. That is, of course, because many more than before are now proposed for consideration by the House. In other words, if 25, 40 or 50 years ago only one or two such amendments were proposed every session, not many of them were ruled out of order—perhaps one or two every session.

It seems to me from my experience, which is very limited in comparison with that of many other hon. members of this House—and I go back only to the days when I was Deputy Speaker—that I had the impression

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that very few people understood a reasoned amendment. It is only in recent years that the use of that kind of device has flourished—

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): That is progress.

Mr. Speaker:—for the benefit of hon. members and a nightmare for the Chair. Because there has been a tendency in that direction, I have intended for some recent weeks and particularly in recent days to study very closely all our precedents in relation to these motions. This is a study which I admit is not yet completed. When it is, I feel I will be in a much better position to set down rules which will take into account not only British but relevant Canadian precedents.

Briefly, hon. members know, from my having quoted them on a number of occasions, which rules govern the content of reasoned amendments. These are enumerated in May's seventeenth edition at page 527. As suggested by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), I am sorry to have to disappoint hon. members but I have got May too. Among other rules, it is required that such amendments should be "declaratory of some principle adverse to, or differing from, the principles, policy or provisions of the bill".

Looking at the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Edmonton West, I find it difficult to identify any such principle—in other words, that the amendment is "declaratory of some principle adverse to, or differing from, the principles, policy or provisions of the bill". Other conditions expressed by Sir Erskine May are enumerated at page 527 of his seventeenth edition. I doubt whether there is any purpose in my reading paragraphs 1, 2 and 3.

Looking at this question closely, I appreciate that in many respects the amendment proposed by the hon. member and now before the House quite seems to meet some of the requirements proposed by Sir Erskine May. The most important of these, of course, is that the principle of relevancy should govern every such motion. This is the point which was made very clearly and cogently a moment ago by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) in suggesting to hon. members that relevancy is the cornerstone of parliamentary debate. There can be no effective parliamentary debate, there can be no logical debate without the application of this principle by the Chair and, I should add, without respect for the principle by all hon. members who take part in the debate.

As my colleagues will recognize, it is a most difficult task, and a great responsibility for the Chair to insist that hon. members address themselves to the question before the House, not to stray too far and to try to limit contributions to the motion before the House. It is a basic principle that there can be debate only when there is a motion before the House, and contributions should always be limited to what we have before us. Otherwise I suggest there can be no meaningful debate in the House.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to invite hon. members to limit themselves to what is before the House at the time. It is the duty of the Chair to suggest to hon. members that amendments should be relevant to motions