

*Point of Order—Mr. Nielsen*

sibilities and show that we can act as adults when circumstances so require.

For all those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I think that the decision you took last night was quite sound, intelligent and sensible. Besides, you did not suspend the sitting indefinitely, but you did indicate shortly after six o'clock that the bells would start ringing again at 9 a.m., because you knew there was no point in having the vote in the middle of the night, something which is not humane and which, to my knowledge, has never happened under the new rules of the House.

Given those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, we support this intelligent and humane decision. Did it go against the Standing Orders or the parliamentary practice? The answer is no! Your decision did not go against any Standing Order nor any practice. Mr. Speaker, one can set precedents without necessarily going against the rules; indeed, no rule was broken and it was not necessarily contrary to precedents or previous practices. We have been innovating since the new Standing Orders have been in force, and I think that you can appeal to common sense for guidance in the kind of decision you made last night. As a matter of fact, when you decided to suspend the call of the bells for the night, you did not breach the only Standing Order which refers to the division bells. You did not go against Standing Order 12 in any way. I know of no precedent either which you might have disregarded. My learned colleague referred you to what he himself called a precedent, although it was not quite the same situation. I am talking about the incidents of May 9, 1983 when Madam Speaker, your predecessor, had indicated that, after consultations, she had decided to interrupt the division bells. I suggest that it was a specific case where, under the circumstances, she had decided to have consultations and say so publicly. Even if she had not consulted anyone, she was just as free to act as you did last night. Yesterday, you were free to consult and, whichever way you did, we respect your authority, Mr. Speaker. However, the fact that, when you interrupted the bells, you did not say in so many words that you had consulted the parties in the House does not mean that you were wrong. And I would suggest that this is one of the grey areas of the Standing Orders, but that the circumstances require that you make decisions which are logical and take into consideration the spirit of the parliamentary reform as well as the human aspect. Mr. Speaker, the major aspect of the parliamentary reform with which we have been experimenting for nearly two years is indeed that we wanted to make Parliament more humane. We no longer sit in the evening; we sit during the day, like other human beings who normally work during the daytime. Committees may sit during the evening and we may work in our offices, but the House sits during the day. On Fridays, we have deferred votes. There have been many changes which have done much to humanize this institution. It seems to me that it was also with this in mind that the bells were prevented from ringing during the night as we knew quite well that there was a

very good reason for the vote not to be registered during the night and as one of the two senior clerks of the House who are part of the voting procedure, had been told by the Government whip that it was physically impossible to have the vote registered before the next day. The Chair was told of this by the clerks of the House.

Because of these circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I think that there is no doubt that we support your ruling and hope that, in the future, if this situation ever reoccurs, you will continue to act with compassion and intelligence, as you have always done in the past. I shall conclude by saying that, in view of the circumstances, we must distinguish between delaying a vote and insisting that it be taken. What we are discussing here is a situation where there are no rules forcing us to have a vote registered within a specified period of time. In such cases the Chair is allowed a lot of discretion. If, as suggested by the Hon. Member for Yukon, you deem it appropriate to have further consultations, we are always at your disposal to explain why a vote cannot be registered at a given time. However, Mr. Speaker, there was no reason yesterday to rush things and I am sure that my learned colleague from Yukon would not go so far as to make such a request because, after all, we had not been through sixteen days of bell ringing. The bells had rung for six hours and a half at the most and while we once considered that having to listen to the bells for sixteen days was quite trying, and believed that consultations would have shown that such a delay was due to purely dilatory action on the part of one specific party in the House, this is all in the past. But now letting the bells ring for six and a half hours cannot be compared with letting them ring for sixteen days, and I doubt that it could be said that either one of our parties is using purely dilatory tactics to prevent a vote from taking place.

In this case, the Government was not ready to vote. Sure enough the Government is not interested in delaying passage of its own legislation, and it seems to me that any intelligent person would realize in such cases that there had to be a major reason for it. The non-attendance of Members when it is due to serious, objective and non partisan reasons, as was the case yesterday, seems to me something which ought to be taken into consideration by the Chair.

I therefore do not see how the point of order raised by the Hon. Member for Yukon could be founded, notwithstanding his comments. If he wants to ask the Speaker to have further consultations in the future if ever the bells are ringing for too long, I would find this suggestion intelligent and reasonable and would approve of it wholeheartedly. However, there is certainly nothing to prevent you, Mr. Speaker, if you have valid reasons, from doing so in the future, to interrupt the ringing of the bells when a vote cannot be registered especially after the normal sitting hours or between two regular sittings. I therefore see nothing which would indicate that you did anything wrong last night. On the contrary, at the risk of