

*Business of the House***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to revert to House business for a moment in order to ask a question of the Government House Leader.

In giving us an indication of the business that he anticipates, the Government House Leader has taken us as far as Thursday next. He indicated that he might be in a position at some future time to tell us about Opposition days. He will recall that a week ago I asked both him and the Secretary of State for External Affairs whether they would consider a statement on motions on the very topic which the Secretary of State for External Affairs has now tabled, the document related to the framework agreement.

Since there is no Opposition day in the immediate future and no apparent opportunity for a reasonable debate on the question of the framework agreement, is either the House Leader or the Secretary of State for External Affairs prepared to indicate whether a statement will be made on motions to allow for some discussion of this very important document?

Mr. Pinard: I have indicated that at the beginning of next week I might designate one day next week. That could well be Friday next, which will still be next week. The Opposition would have a good opportunity to raise this matter if they felt it was important to be raised. Meanwhile, I want to assure my colleague that he will have the opportunity to ask questions on the matter during Question Period every day next week. The Minister, his assistant, the acting Minister, or his Parliamentary Secretary will be here and will be very pleased to answer questions on the subject.

I want to assure my colleague that he will have ample opportunity to raise this matter. There are still four Opposition days before March 26, and between March 26 and June 30 an additional 13 Opposition days will be available. If they really care about this matter, they will use one of those days to debate this most important issue.

Mr. Deans: Madam Speaker, I am most grateful to the Minister for pointing out that we will have an opportunity to ask questions. We have that anyway. The difficulty is, as he will understand, that this is a document of vital importance, not only to Canada but to many other parts of the world. Up until this point in time, the document has not been available to Canadians for their scrutiny and, therefore, has not been debated in any form.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Government has put the whole system of statements on motions into disuse, is it not reasonable to ask, on a matter of such vital importance to the country, that the Secretary of State for External Affairs stand in his place and at least for ten minutes explain the content, the substance and direction that this agreement will take?

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I was most sympathetic to the request of the Hon. Member until he stated that the Government has made misuse of Statements by Ministers. It is the Opposition that misused this period of time.

Mr. Deans: I said disuse, not misuse.

Mr. Pinard: Disuse as well was caused by the Opposition. I feel they have ample opportunity to raise this matter. The documents were tabled today and are available. Parliament is aware of this. Starting tomorrow this question can be raised during Question Period. There are some 20 Opposition days between now and June 30.

If the NDP are really serious about this, they will see fit to use one of their Opposition days to raise this matter and not force the Government to limit debate all the time because they want to score political points and prevent Parliament from working, as they did with the last three Bills dealing with the six and five policy of the Government which have succeeded in bringing down inflation to 8 or 9 per cent.

Mr. McKinnon: Madam Speaker, I wish to speak on the same point of order. I would point out to the House Leader of the Government that traditionally Canada has always put international commitments before the House of Commons for approval or advice. This went on in the regime of the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker, the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent and the Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson. They all believed that Parliament had a role to play in the formulation of our foreign policy and that international commitments were to be ratified by the House of Commons. This practice has died out in the last 10, 12 or 14 years. This is a major commitment that we are making.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I cannot see the point of order in the Hon. Member's intervention. I believe he is debating the substance. I know he would like to do that, but this is not the time. We are dealing with House business. If the Hon. Member has a question about that, he may ask it. However, he may not enter the debate now on this particular matter.

Mr. McKinnon: Madam Speaker, this is a very difficult hour that you have caught us in. The Secretary of State for External Affairs now wishes to embarrass us on this. He has locked the barn door and now wants us to debate something that has been cast in stone by the very same Secretary of State for External Affairs. This has reduced Parliament to a nonentity. Why do we have a Parliament? I would ask the House Leader, why do we have a Parliament if we have nothing to say about international commitments that the Government enters into?

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, that is exactly the question I was tempted to ask the Hon. Member in 1979 when he was Minister of National Defence. He made a very important decision on double-tracking in relation to NATO, but did he seize Parliament of that? I just wonder what he did at the time. He is in a very bad position to preach any example to be set.

The Hon. Member quoted previous Prime Ministers. In 1968 there were changes in the rules which allowed the Opposition the benefit of 25 days during the year. Therefore, they have full opportunity to debate any matter of their choice, including this very important subject. If they consider the