

Point of Order

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, may I contribute to that? I have laid out information for the House that I went to the table between 6.20 and 6.30. I asked and was told that it was embargoed. I, as the whip, did that. I think there were witnesses to that, and the table can confirm that for you very easily.

What the whip of the New Democratic Party has said is that one of his staff people approached the Parliamentary Secretary to the government House Leader with information about the votability of the motion at 6.45. This was some 25 minutes after I went to the table, but some 45 minutes after the normal close of business at which point it would have been possible for the government to do the allotting.

We were informed through other channels that the clock had run out at six o'clock because the notice period had run out at six o'clock. Certainly, I think it is clear, and all that you need to be seized with at this point, is that at 6.20 to 6.30, some 20 to 30 minutes after the notice had to be filed, the embargo was certainly in place from the table's point of view and was communicated to me at that point.

I had an opportunity at the conclusion of the vote to provide information to my members before they started to disperse, but without having the notice, the chance to communicate was lost. The whole purpose of notice is for members to have certitude as much as possible about their world. It may have been inadvertent on the part of the New Democratic Party's caucus to put in place that embargo, but certainly the table felt at 6.20 that it could not give me as the Chief Government Whip that piece of information. I was told directly that I would have to wait to see what it said on the Order Paper this morning.

In a technical sense the government is quite frequently in the difficult position of getting a verbal communication when in fact there is a written communication which is official. You must always be careful. In the past, on opposition days, and it has been many, many months now, Mr. Speaker, we have in our possession by six o'clock or shortly thereafter a printed copy of the motion and a printed copy of the intention of whether it is votable or not. That is the normal expectation that I would have as the Chief Government Whip that at six o'clock the night before I have this information.

Last night the table would not give it to me. I just want to make that clear. The fact that at 6.45 there was a conversation between a staff person of the New Democratic Party and our parliamentary secretary may be helpful, but it is not official.

Mr. Speaker: I will hear the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan further, and I will come to the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands in a moment.

Mr. Angus: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the government whip's comments. One of the questions that Your Honour will have to decide upon is whether an opposition party has the right to have the table embargo such information. We thought we were doing what was appropriate in terms of advising the government verbally. There is nothing in the rules that I know of that requires us to provide it with a written indication that a motion will be votable.

Mr. Speaker: One moment, please. I want to make it very clear I am not even raising that issue. It was a conflict in what I have been hearing and I wanted it straightened out. Sometimes the Chair has to make procedural rulings based on what the circumstances really are and some common sense. But I am not for one minute putting up for grabs the issue as to whether or not the table is required to release information under the procedure that was followed last night.

As I understand it, the procedure is exactly the same for both sides of the House. I will listen to the hon. member further.

Mr. Angus: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate those comments. I only have a couple more points to make.

Just as an observation, there is a chronic problem with notice. We might want to at some point refer that for consideration. For example, the government can give notice of a motion on Friday and move it on Monday morning. The earliest that we could technically see the text is on Saturday when the Order Paper is produced. There are some problems there and this may just be another element of that.

I should point out that from our point of view this is only a notice of motion. The government has not as of yet allocated Friday as an opposition day. I think that it has no choice given the other Standing Orders. However, this motion or the votability issue could in fact be withdrawn. If the government had wished to concern