

Business of the House

better served if we could go on with the capital punishment debate but, not being able to do that, the government will have to revise its plans and do what we can with other business.

Mr. Churchill: I estimate that only 20 per cent of the members of the house have participated in the debate on capital punishment. Does the house leader consider it possible to provide an opportunity for the remaining 80 per cent to make speeches, if they so desire, tomorrow or on Thursday, and complete the debate?

Mr. McIlraith: The fundamental difference between myself and the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre on this point is that I find myself completely unable to accept the figures he has given in his estimate. That is the difficulty on a matter like this, which is a private members measure. It is difficult to be sure of how many members wish to speak. According to the best information I could get by consulting members of the different parties, and having other people do so, the resolution could probably come to a vote by tomorrow night, or certainly on Wednesday, or failing that, sometime on Thursday at the latest. That was what was in my mind in announcing the business for the house.

Mr. Knowles: I wonder if I may put a question to the government house leader. It is based on the government's commitment in the Speech from the Throne to make arrangements for a decision to be reached concerning capital punishment. If a way can be found within the rules, and I believe it can, for government time to be given to this debate tomorrow, is the government willing to make that arrangement?

Mr. McIlraith: That was the point I was considering. I think we can do this without unanimous consent. But since I did have the courtesy to ask the house for unanimous consent and was refused, I may be forced into the position of using other methods which I heartily dislike.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, I think the house is entitled to know which hon. member did have the discourtesy to refuse unanimous consent to a very reasonable request.

Mr. Lambert: I do not think it was discourteous.

Mr. Fairweather: Perhaps you do not, Edmonton, but I do.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, it would be extremely useful to the house if the government house leader could either now or tomorrow give some assurance that the government will allow sufficient time for this debate on abolition of capital punishment to go on until there is a determination by the house, rather than facing the prospect that the motion may be talked out.

Mr. McIlraith: We are caught in a difficult situation here. It would be an act of irresponsibility to say that the government will continue this debate until there is a vote. If there is no will in the house to reach a decision there could be one amendment after another, with debate, for the sake of preventing a decision. That would mean that all other legislation would have to be put aside. There is a responsibility for parliament to provide an opportunity for consideration of government business and its acceptance or rejection, as hon. members see fit, after proper debate.

Our problem is really to find a technique that will provide private members with a full and proper opportunity to discuss this matter. Having done that, and having made that government time available by taking it away from government matters, I think we are entitled to have a decision made by parliament. I am prepared to be as reasonable as one can properly be, with any sense of responsibility, in order that this matter can be completely debated and a vote taken.

Mr. Douglas: May I just say to the minister that I was not suggesting that the debate go beyond Thursday. I realize that the budget debate has to begin and that government legislation must be proceeded with, but if there can be some agreement that if the vote is not reached by Thursday time will be allowed later in the session so that this matter can be considered, it would be helpful.

Mr. McIlraith: I think we are getting involved in another question as to how much government time should responsibly be taken away from government business in order to make it available for this debate, because such an order would simply mean there would be no vote on Thursday. Surely that is not what is desired by the vast majority of members on all sides of the house.

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister one question. What will be the first item on orders of the day tomorrow?