

This provision formerly applied in the House to the reading of papers other than those on which the House was to vote. That was under an earlier form of clause 6 of rule XVII, which now applies only to the use of exhibits in debate. For a history of the former rule on reading papers and an explanation of the earlier practice, see §§ 963–965, *infra*.

Leave asked to withdraw a motion. The rule of Parliament being that a motion made and seconded is in the possession of the House, and can not be withdrawn without leave, the very terms of the rule imply that leave may be given, and, consequently, may be asked and put to the question.

The House does not vote on the withdrawal of motions, but provides by clause 2 of rule XVI and clause 5 of rule XVIII the conditions under which a Member may of right withdraw a motion.

SEC. XXXIV—THE PREVIOUS QUESTION

When any question is before the House, any Member may move a previous question, “Whether that question (called the main question) shall now be put?” If it pass in the affirmative, then the main question is to be put immediately, and no man may speak anything further to it, either to add or alter. *Memor. in Hakew., 28; 4 Grey, 27.*

The previous question being moved and seconded, the question from the Chair shall be, “Shall the main question be now put?” and if the nays prevail, the main question shall not then be put.

This kind of question is understood by Mr. Hatsell to have been introduced in 1604. *2 Hats., 80.* Sir Henry Vane introduced it. *2 Grey, 113, 114; 3*

Grey, 384. When the question was put in this form, "Shall the main question be put?" a determination in the negative suppressed the main question during the session; but since the words "now put" are used, they exclude it for the present only; formerly, indeed, only till the present debate was over, 4 *Grey*, 43, but now for that day and no longer. 2 *Grey*, 113, 114.

Before the question "Whether the main question shall now be put?" any person might formerly have spoken to the main question, because otherwise he would be precluded from speaking to it at all. *Mem. in Hakew.*, 28.

The proper occasion for the previous question is when a subject is brought forward of a delicate nature as to high personages, &c., or the discussion of which may call forth observations which might be of injurious consequences. Then the previous question is proposed, and in the modern usage the discussion of the main question is suspended and the debate confined to the previous question. The use of it has been extended abusively to other cases, but in these it has been an embarrassing procedure. Its uses would be as well answered by other more simple parliamentary forms, and therefore it should not be favored, but restricted within as narrow limits as possible.

As explained in connection with clause 1 of rule XIX, the House has changed entirely the old use of the previous question (V, 5445).