

already had 7,200 seconds—two whole hours—to demand even more time. Perhaps he asked the representatives of the opposition parties to publicly apologize for having already wasted so much of the valuable time of the House on the bill. After all, the government members had much better things to do—although no one ever explains what those better things are -- than to provide quorum or to participate in debate.

One can only surmise that, notwithstanding whatever reasonable arguments the minister advanced, the opposition members remained obstinate. One could not reason with them. They would continue their two-hour filibuster. Thus, this defender of Parliament was left with no choice, which is why on Monday, June 8, probably manifesting a heavy heart, he gave notice of time allocation.

On Tuesday, June 9, Mr. Andre actually moved the motion for time allocation. It was voted on almost immediately since the Standing Orders forbid debate on the motion. The House then turned its attention to Bill C-80 and, following another four hours and 20 minutes of debate, the guillotine crashed down. The vote was taken and the legislation was referred to committee.

There it was; less than seven hours of debate at second reading. There are 295 members in the other place, and there was only seven hours of debate. The government believed, I take it, that the 295 members had better things to do than to debate the dynamiting of Canada's premier social program.

If what occurred in the House of Commons at second reading was a travesty of the parliamentary process, which I believe it was for legislation of this importance, at least the contempt shown by the government was reserved for the members of that chamber, including their own members who I suppose enjoy being denigrated in this way. What subsequently occurred in committee was even worse, according to those who wished to participate in the process.

The House of Commons Legislative Committee on Bill C-80 held its organization meeting on June 11. On June 15, it heard from the responsible minister—not the Honourable Benoit Bouchard, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, but the Honourable Don Mazankowski, the Minister of Finance. Here we again see the priorities. From the government's point of view, Bill C-80 was not legislation that dealt with the health or welfare of Canadians but, rather, a measure designed to help the Minister of Finance and the government politically.

When the minister had concluded, Conservative member Barbara Sparrow moved that the hearings "... terminate on Tuesday, June 23, and that would be the end of the witnesses for Bill C-80." That quotation is from page 1:41 of the proceedings of the committee.

When opposition members explained that terminating all hearings in only eight days was unfair to all those who were interested in appearing, Barbara Sparrow, at the suggestion of the chairman, finally withdrew her motion. Nice try.

The committee met on seven more occasions that summer before winding up its hearings on July 16. Why did it have to conclude in July when it could not present its report to the House for another two months anyway? Whatever the reason, the decision to conclude in mid-July had unfortunate consequences, because some groups were unable to meet the deadline imposed by the committee.

The National Anti-Poverty Organization submitted a brief dated July 16, which brief began as follows:

The National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) is unable to appear before your committee. We deeply regret this situation because we believe that Bill C-80 is flawed and dangerous. We would have welcomed the opportunity of explaining our position to you in person.

However, this is impossible because of the timing of your hearings . . .

This is very unfortunate because we have something to say on behalf of poor families . . .

Your inflexible schedule of hearings has in effect silenced us and we vehemently protest this situation.

That was but one of the consequences. Other groups or individuals who did appear had little opportunity to prepare, and felt insulted and demeaned by the whole process. For example, I refer to a letter received by David Walker, our critic on social policy in the other place, from Barbara Blouin of Tupper Grove, Nova Scotia. Miss Blouin appeared before the legislative committee on June 23, 1992, getting in before the closing of the committee, and this is how she described her experience. She begins by saying that the chairman:

... cut me off just as I was beginning my talk and seemed bored and impatient.

In fact, the whole experience was most disheartening. I am beginning to understand increasingly the democratic process under the Mulroney government is nothing but a sham, a charade. When virtually all the witnesses called for Bill C-80 criticized it (I had already read about it in the "Globe & Mail"), but nevertheless the bill is rammed through the committee process by the majority of its Tory members, there can be no other conclusion than this: They don't listen, they don't respond, they're not answerable to the people, they'll do what they want because they have the power to do so. I haven't felt so powerless in all my life. To actually have an opportunity to speak to some of Canada's leaders, to have worked very hard to write a brief, and then to realize that it meant nothing, and even that I and others were being used to uphold the propaganda that this is a democratic process—it's hard to swallow.

● (1610)

Senator Gigantès: It is her fault for thinking that she could get a hearing from the Tories. She is poor.

Senator Frith: She is certainly disillusioned.