

Proposal for Time Allocation

today will be of assistance to the members of the special committee on procedure, when we meet again either in this session or in the new session that should start soon.

Another advantage, although for the moment I might have to put that word in quotation marks, that flows from today's debate is the interesting list of items of business the Prime Minister gave us this afternoon. I hope that that list was not given merely as a debating point. I can tell the Prime Minister—and his remarks are now on the record—that members in all parts of the house will insist on government action on the many important issues he listed this afternoon.

Mr. Lewis: In 1967, too.

• (9:20 p.m.)

Mr. Knowles: As my hon. friend reminds me, the inference was that this was business which should be done for the people of Canada in 1967, and I say that this commitment on the part of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) will have to take priority over any suggestion of a long holiday or anything else which might crop up.

Like others, as I have said, I regret this impasse. I believe it could have been avoided. One of the ways in which it could have been avoided would have been for the government to have acted completely in the spirit of standing order 15A by calling together all the house leaders, or the members of the business committee, to try to plan the length of time to be allotted to this debate before it started. I know that when I use that word "before" the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill) will probably want to remind me of his statement a few moments ago, that nothing is more ridiculous or nonsensical than to try to plan the length of a debate before it starts. I can only say, then, that the way in which they carry on debates in the United Kingdom must be ridiculous and nonsensical, because the fact is they determine the time to be allotted to practically every debate which takes place in the mother of parliaments.

Mr. Hellyer: Would the hon. gentleman permit a question? While I believe nearly all hon. members would agree with him that it would be better at some time in the future to regulate all the business of the house by referring it to the business committee and reaching some agreement as to the time to be allotted to each measure, does he not believe that had this rule been used at the outset before the commencement of discussion, the

[Mr. Knowles.]

government would have been accused at once of applying closure, even before consideration of the measure began?

Mr. Knowles: I do not agree with that assumption. I believe that had there been an honest attempt on the part of the house leaders or of the business committee to arrange, in advance, a reasonable time for this debate, we would not have found ourselves in the trouble we are in today. I proposed this myself in a television program on Sunday, April 2, before the debate started and I proposed it at a meeting of the house leaders on Monday, April 3. But the other house leaders thought it was not necessary.

I think the day must come when we plan our debates as well as the work of the parliamentary session generally, in advance, and I see no advantage in continuing to put that day off because of the fear which the Minister of National Defence has just expressed.

In the debate today we have before us two main issues. One of them is an immediate issue. The other is a long range issue. The immediate issue is very clear: Has the time come for the House of Commons to take a decision on Bill C-243. Surely, even after we have had our say about the rules and practice of the house, this becomes a matter of judgment—and it is a judgment which individual members will be called upon to exercise in about 20 minutes from now when Your Honour will, no doubt, apply "closure" to my own remarks. In my judgment and in the judgment of my colleagues this matter has been before parliament and before the country long enough for members to be in a position to take a decision.

We cannot liken this debate to the pipe line debate of 1956. I looked up the record today, though I hardly needed to look it up to recall it, and I found that in committee of the whole on that bill we spent practically no time at all debating its clauses. We were in committee of the whole for a few days, but at the very start closure was threatened and it was soon moved, with the result that we spent most of the time fighting closure or discussing points of order. We had practically no discussion at all in committee of the whole on the pipe line issue. On this occasion we have already spent 13 days in committee of the whole on Bill C-243, and even if the motion now before us carries, there will be two more or a total of 15 days. This, in my judgment, plus the time spent on second reading, plus the time spent in the committee on national defence, plus the time which was spent on interim supply is