

Government Organization Act, 1970

on, members of Parliament will hardly have anything else to do but to press on a button to indicate whether they are for or against a bill depending on its title.

Mr. Speaker, the government thinks that because legislation is introduced it will succeed in solving a given problem. As far as the opposition is concerned, it does not seem a good way to do it. And the trouble does not come from the fact that sometimes the opposition will disagree with the government, but, as the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants said a while ago, from the fact that a member may be for five proposals and against the seven others, whereas another supports three proposals and opposes the nine others. A member be in favour of the 12 proposals and likewise he can be against them all.

If the Chair accepts the principle of omnibus bills, whatever their content, only members in favour of the whole bill or those opposed to the whole bill can truly exercise their right to vote in a free and enlightened way. This is riding rough-shod over the enlightened and free vote of all members in favour of some proposals and opposed to others.

If a thorough statistical study were to be undertaken, it would be found that throughout the House extremely few members are either in favour of or against the whole omnibus bill. I voice again our concern that omnibus bills, that I would term package deals and take it or leave it propositions, are used by the government to deprive members of their right to vote freely. Hence, a member is placed in such a position that he actually cannot vote according to his conscience. If he is in favour of certain social measures, it does not necessarily mean that he would be in favour of 50 other proposals included in the bill. Under this procedure, the member is forced to vote for or against a bill as a whole under the pretext of speeding up the proceedings.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the time has not come to establish at this stage whether it is better to speed up the proceedings to the limit, or to respect the stand and the views of the various members on each proposal contained in a bill.

As far as we are concerned, we strongly object to the principle of omnibus bills which trample on the rights and freedom of members and also on the authority of Parliament, which can easily dispose of motions, as can often be seen.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to page 56 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. I have little experience of parliamentary procedure, but nevertheless I wish to quote paragraph (10) of Standing Order 58, which reads in part as follows:

—the Speaker... shall put forthwith successively, without debate or amendment, every question necessary to dispose of any item of business relating to interim supply, main estimates, and supplementary of final estimates—

So, Mr. Speaker, I wonder why at this stage you could not raise and put all the questions contained in the

[Mr. Fortin.]

omnibus bill so that the business of the House might be expedited to the great satisfaction of the government.

Mr. Speaker, you may smile at this little example because it is so simple, but it certainly would be normal, especially as we are aware of your concern for the protection of members' rights. If it is abnormal to move a motion to cover all those financial matters, we suggest that a bad procedure is being perpetuated because then we keep supporting the government when it introduces omnibus bills that may contain from 10 to 200 different proposals.

Mr. Speaker, the argument of the President of the Privy Council has no validity whatever, for it is utterly preposterous to talk about a "reorganization of the government". If it had any validity, one could in the same bill introduce a motion on every department and Crown corporation and all the Chair would have to say is: "It is true, these various elements are related because they all have to do with the government."

Mr. Speaker, I maintain that this is an instrument in the hands of this government to trample democracy and participation, as well as the freedom of each member.

I hope to be forgiven for this argumentation which is more or less in order. I merely wanted to base it on good common sense which, I submit, is too often trampled on in this chamber.

[English]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, some 15 or 20 minutes ago I thought I had a number of fresh arguments to advance, but the last two speakers have pretty well covered the ground which I had hoped to cover. Having listened to them, and more particularly to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen), I am more than ever convinced that my colleague, the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) is correct.

It seems to me that the minister, in effect, is asking Parliament to say that the end justifies the means. He says that the purpose of this bill is the efficient re-organization of the government, and therefore everything can be locked into the same bag. I put it to him that his argument is ridiculous because we could take every measure that comes before the House dealing with matters of trade, whether sponsored by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) or the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin), lump them into one bill, and say that they were for the more efficient prosecution of the trade of Canada. In other words, during a whole session we might have perhaps only half a dozen omnibus bills. I see the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) benignly nodding his head. That is just the attitude I find so repugnant, the attitude that the end would justify the means.

I find it exceedingly difficult to see how one can ask the House to pronounce itself, on second reading, on a ministry to be set up to deal with environmental control, which I am sure meets with general approval in the