

Business of the House

It is quite true that the government will have the power, if I understand correctly the procedure of closure, when we come back next Thursday to cut us off, as the hon. member has indicated, at two o'clock next morning. I do not know if that is actually in the rules—

Mr. Knowles: Standing order 39.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Then that gives even more significance to the threat of closure; and of course I accept the knowledge of the hon. member on that point. Nevertheless it is hard for me not to believe that the government, with the considerable influence it has in the house, if it wanted to go a little longer than two o'clock next morning, could not do so. As we have reason to know, the government has very considerable mastery over the house. At any rate I shall not match my views with those of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre on that point, because it is not necessary to tie myself to any view in the matter.

My feeling is that for us to be driven into panic by the threat which has been made would be in the highest degree foolish. As I said before, it is in my opinion an utterly unwarrantable tampering with the rights of the minority. For many years there has been nothing of that kind. There was a time when this house, I believe, did sit all night, or at any rate until the very small hours of the morning. Of course there were facilities in the house at that time which are not available today. Perhaps the men of those days were giants in more ways than one. But I gather they did not have to rely wholly upon nature unassisted. I think the remarks of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mrs. Fairclough) as to the barrenness of the land, in respect of refreshments—if we have to stay here the whole night—are worthy of consideration.

It may be said that, after all, we are merely doing what is done in the British House of Commons. I believe they do sit long hours on occasion; but I submit the situation there is very different. They have something like 650 members, and no doubt they are able to spell each other in a way we are not able to do.

We have tried to behave like sensible men. I wish to point out again that no reason has been given for this haste. We have already spent four hours rather unprofitably, I think. It may be that we would have been on our way home by now, with all the bills passed—no one can prove that is not so—had it not been for this unfortunate step taken by the gentleman sitting to my left. No reason has been given, no effective suggestion has been made, no argument worthy of the name has

been offered for taking this step. The hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr (Mr. Coldwell) greatly to my surprise—immensely to my surprise, because usually I regard him as one of the men in the house most devoted to its rights and privileges—has taken an opposite view. When I heard what he said this morning I could scarcely believe my ears. What he said was that everything that should be said in this debate in connection with resale price maintenance had been said. I submit there is only one person who can say that—and He is not in the house. I refer to a higher power than ours. How is anyone in the house, the Prime Minister or anyone else, to say when everything has been said that should be said? That makes a fool of the whole business. We have rules in the house. As I have said, the government has the right of closure. They can come along and say, "We will move closure", and the effects will be as have been stated.

I presume we will not have the Prime Minister undertaking to play the part of the Almighty and say, when the motion for closure is made, that he is making it because everything that needs to be said has been said. I presume he would just make it with the power of his government and his majority behind him. But to me it does show how utterly wrong-headed some of us have become in the matter.

I do not know what has happened to my friends to the left. I have been for some time in the habit of following them, but I certainly will have to be more careful in future about doing so, because today they seem to have been false guides to an extent I would not have believed possible.

Mr. Knowles: You do not mean the blind leading the blind?

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): I was thinking of that but I left it out, because I did not want to insult you or myself. But I come back seriously to say this, that we have had a debate on this important question. So far as I am concerned, I confess I have not been able to my own satisfaction to read the proceedings of the committee, of which I was not a member. But I should be permitted to study those proceedings if I am to come to a satisfactory conclusion on this subject. I must say my reading to date of the proceedings indicates to me that its work was not completed, that we have not the evidence we need.

The speech of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) confirmed that view; because, to the best of my recollection, nearly all the evidence he gave did not come from the committee proceedings but from other, independent sources. I am not quarrelling