

National Defence Act Amendment

Mr. Knowles: Before we get into trouble.

Mr. Olson: Yes, before we get into too much trouble, because it would be very difficult to limit debate after the house deteriorated, if that is the right word, into an ugly mood so far as the bill is concerned.

Subsection 3 of the standing order states:

The business committee shall report back to the house on or before the third sitting day following such reference.

The minister can decide for himself how long he wants to wait before using this standing order. Maybe he thinks the bill will pass in one or two days. I would be willing to wait about three days, but after that time I suggest that he take it upon himself to move a motion referring the matter to the business committee. The rule provides that the committee is required to report back to the house within three days. But the committee might sit for only an hour before it became completely obvious its members could not agree, or it could sit for the full three days.

Subsections 5 and 6 of the standing order provide that in the event the business committee cannot agree, the minister may move for limitation of time. Subsection 7 states however, that—

—no motion made by a minister under sections 5 and 6 of this standing order shall provide for the allocation of a period of time less than two days for the second reading, two days for the committee stage, and one day for the third reading of any bill.

I would suggest to the minister that he be careful not to impose the absolute minimum of time specified in the standing order. Even if he finds out from whoever is on the business committee from the Conservative party that they are not going to agree to anything—and that has happened before, you know—

Mr. Lambert: You are being very sanctimonious.

Mr. Olson: —he does not have to impose the absolute minimum of time in the standing order.

There are some 48 pages in the bill and I suggest the minister should not give the Conservatives cause for the old cry that closure is being imposed by imposing the absolute minimum under standing order 15-A. What I seriously suggest to the minister is that if it becomes apparent that there is not going to be any agreement by the business committee, then we should have about three or four days for the committee stage. I think

one day is enough for third reading, but we probably need more than two days in committee on something as important as this.

I hope the debate is not going to go on, and on, and on. It has gone on for a long time already and it can only get more acrimonious as the days go by. If there has not already been opportunity for all members who want to make representations with respect to the bill, then we should continue for a few more days, but I believe we have reached the stage where almost everything new that could be said about the bill has been said, and debate will be a little repetitious from now on.

I suggest we could continue for another three or perhaps four days before the minister imposes the provisions of standing order 15-A, and while the matter is before the business committee we could discuss some other item of business. But when the matter returns from the business committee I suggest another four or five days debate would be enough. Let us not have the House of Commons and the whole country bogged down because there are one or two, or half a dozen of our members unwilling to accept the majority decision of the house.

Mr. Churchill: Will the hon. member accept a question?

Mr. Olson: Yes, sir.

Mr. Churchill: If the hon. member's suggestion of closure is adopted by the government—and he often acts as a spokesman for the government—what percentage of time in that limited period would be given to his party of four and a half members? I think one member of his party is sort of leaving them now.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Chairman, I have to straighten the hon. member's thinking out again, as I have often had to do. First of all, I am never the spokesman for the government. In case the hon. member was not sure about that—

Mr. Churchill: Should I have used the word stooge?

Mr. Olson: The hon. member said I am often the spokesman for the government, and I am telling him I have never been appointed spokesman for the government. He then described as closure the procedure that I suggested. Closure does not come under standing order 15-A, which provides for allocation of time.