

Business of the House

before witnesses are heard. That, Sir, is what this debate is all about.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre put his finger right on it when he said that it is the right of every member of this House to be heard. Sir, we have that right. I will be the first to concede to the parliamentary secretary and to the government House leader that at times, infrequently to be sure, closure can be justified. But I submit that closure under Standing Order 75C was never meant to be applied as a general principle.

Mr. Blais: It is not closure. It is time allocation.

Mr. McGrath: Consider what has happened since the beginning of this session. We are now debating the fourth closure motion introduced since this parliament began. What does this mean? The government talks about managing the business of the House; but when you talk about four closure motions you are talking about debate taking two full parliamentary days.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McGrath: Yes, Mr. Speaker, you are talking about debate taking two parliamentary days.

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point or order. The hon. member suggested that the government has introduced four closure motions. I submit that that is not correct. There have been only three closure motions. Allocation of time was not used with respect to the anti-inflation bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. The hon. member can deal with that point if he makes a speech.

Mr. McGrath: The fact remains that important time of this House has been used to debate closure motions brought in under Standing Order 75C. That is a shameful misuse of the time of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: The government's shameful action in bringing in closure on this bill will ultimately be reflected in the votes which voters will cast when the government goes to the country to give an account of itself. Make no mistake about it, closure will be an issue.

I was surprised to hear the Minister of Justice, a parliamentarian for whom I have the greatest respect, stand up and try to justify closure after only six days of debate on the principle of the bill. I listened to him very carefully. He brought forward that well-worn cliché: parliament disposes, the government proposes. He meant that this government proposes and arbitrarily disposes, and to hell with parliament. That is the government's attitude.

I hope the Minister of Justice can assure us before this debate ends that this bill in committee will not be treated as Bill C-58 was treated. As you remember, Sir, the government introduced closure in the House with respect to Bill C-58. When the bill was sent to committee we found ourselves once more faced with closure in committee. We were

[Mr. McGrath.]

told to send Bill C-58 back to the House before Christmas. And what happened? We did not reach Bill C-58 again in the House until last month. How can the government justify its shameful use of closure on that occasion? It introduced closure on second reading, and closure again when the bill was in committee. I see the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Cafik) nodding, apparently in approval. He was on that committee and knows that what I say is right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member. His time has expired.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, today when the government House leader moved the closure motion under Standing Order 75C we learned what the new society is all about. At one time I thought the government wanted to do away with free enterprise. Without equivocating, I say that the government seeks to emasculate the opposition. That, exactly, is what it wants to do. The government wants to reduce us to nobodies. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford), and the government House leader have said so in so many words. They want to reduce us to nobodies, and we will not accept it. The government seeks to erode the authority of parliament. I only wish the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert were here this evening. He would tell the House what this is all about.

The government has conveniently forgotten the role of the opposition. It is our role to be the watchdog of the public purse and to make the government behave. It is hard to make this government behave properly. It is also our duty to offer constructive criticism. This we have done all along, but the government pays no attention. This insensitive, arrogant government does not want a watchdog, does not want to be told how to behave, does not want to listen to constructive criticism. Yes, I recall the words of some ministers, "We are the masters of this House." Nobody falls for that nonsense. There is a responsible role for the opposition to play. We accept our responsibility, no matter what the government wants to do.

The Prime Minister's attitude to the opposition is, if they don't like it they can lump it.

Mr. Cullen: Really, really!

Mr. Alexander: I see the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Cullen) opposite me. He is one of the class of '68 and no doubt remembers the statement attributed to the Prime Minister, "If they don't like it, they can lump it." Well, when the Prime Minister says that to me he is talking indirectly to between 80,000 and 100,000 people. As my hon. friend from St. John's East said, the people will not forget in the next election.

Here the government is, closing off debate on an important measure. It says we may debate the closure motion for two hours and the bill for four more days. What will happen when the bill is in committee? The work of our committees is a myth. Our committee structure is a farce. It is insensitive to the wishes of opposition members. So far as I am concerned the committees are nothing but a means for pushing through government bills. The opposition has been muzzled even in committee. I have seen much hanky-panky in committees. We have asked that witnesses be called, and the government refused.