

Redistribution

not the time, on orders of the day, to try to regulate the debate which we will have under the redistribution act later this week.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): With great deference, Mr. Speaker, I think there is a very significant principle at stake here. The minister has stated that by statute we are limited in the time the house can take for the discussion of this matter. My understanding—and I have not looked up the law; I did not expect this matter to be raised today—is that the only fixation is that in so many days after the reports are made the discussion shall have taken place and be completed.

What the minister is saying, in effect, is that having delayed so long in introducing this matter he now has but a few days, and because of the failure of the government to introduce it earlier we are to be subjected to a guillotine to be fixed by the government. That is something we will not accept, Mr. Speaker, with great deference.

It is a serious step that is being taken. The government is asking parliament not to debate this matter at greater length because it failed to bring the matter before parliament in the intervening weeks since the house began the session. Surely we cannot be limited by self serving action on the part of the government to save itself from the consequences of its failure to bring this matter before parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Whether or not the point raised by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition is well taken, I suggest again that this is not the time to reach a decision on the matter. In due course, perhaps when the motion is made later on or after we have discussed the different objections in the house, there may be further consideration by hon. members on whether there should be a time limit. But I suggest we cannot decide the question at this time.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, my understanding of the situation is that by statute the debate on the redistribution question has to be completed by a week from next Wednesday.

Mr. McIlraith: That is correct.

Mr. Douglas: The whole purpose of the motion by the house leader for the government is that the time between now, or whenever the debate starts, and a week from

[Mr. Speaker.]

Wednesday should be allocated by the business committee of the house in such a way that every member who has an objection will have an opportunity to state that objection, rather than having a few of the objections dealt with and the rest left untouched.

• (3:00 p.m.)

I can see no harm in referring this matter to the business committee. My understanding of the new rules is that the business committee still has to report back and ask for an order of the house with reference to any allocation of time. We are not allocating time by this motion. All we are doing is to ask the business committee to discuss the matter and, if they agree, to make a report back and ask for an order of the house allocating time during the period when the debate starts and when it must end a week from next Wednesday. If there is some dispute as to the legislation, to the effect that the debate does not have to end a week from next Wednesday, then we can discuss that matter when the order of the house comes up for discussion, and the house leaders can also discuss it.

It seems to me that the quickest way to dispose of this right now is to agree that the house ask the business committee to look into that matter and see whether there is any possibility of allocating time in such a fair and equitable manner that all members who have complaints may have an opportunity of registering their opposition.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order, you were perfectly right a moment ago when you said that the business committee had not yet been established.

In the circumstances I do not think that the Minister of Public Works should have raised the question before the house at this time. That there should be a meeting of the house leaders to find out how matters stand, it would seem to me that it would be normal to start by that, and then establish the business committee, and report to the house what the house leaders or the business committee have decided.

But, as you said a while ago, no business committee has yet been constituted.

I suggest, pursuant to standing orders, that on this question you ask the Minister of Public Works not to rise again, but wait for the meeting of the house leaders of the various parties and establish the business committee, so that we know exactly where we are going, because, at this time, we do not