

Procedure and Organization

have said and I repeat, it is utterly unreasonable to try, ahead of time, to limit the debate at the report stage. How can you do that? The present rule, as I understand it—and I will be corrected if I am wrong—is that if there is no amendment on the order paper at the report stage, there is no debate at all.

• (8:40 p.m.)

Mr. Woolliams: Right.

Mr. Lewis: Whether the debate should be half a day, one day, two, three, four or five days obviously depends on the number of amendments on the order paper, and not only the number but their importance, the weight of the issues with which the amendments deal. It is utterly stupid, to use an adjective the Prime Minister used in another connection much less reasonably, to suggest in a rule that you will limit debate during the report stage, when the report stage of every bill is an entirely different thing. In one case it may require no debate at all; in another case it may require a debate of an hour or two; in a third case it may require a day, and in a fourth case it may require five or six days, without delaying anything but dealing as honestly and as briefly as possible with the ideas of hon. members which they have the right to place on the order paper for the consideration of parliament.

We said to the government we would agree to a limitation of time on all the other stages, but the report stage should be removed from that limitation. It was possible to discuss the matter further. If the President of the Privy Council had not, on the orders of the Prime Minister, a cabinet committee or the cabinet, I do not know which, closed off discussion, I am certain that some accommodation would have been found. Personally, I felt that if we could not agree upon removing the report stage from 75c, a sensible way of dealing with the matter would have been to place the matter in the hands of Mr. Speaker of this house. In the light of the number of amendments that are put on the order paper and which he now has the duty to consider and decide whether they are in order, to group together wherever grouping is reasonable, and the duty and right to defer votes wherever that was good for the progress of the house, Mr. Speaker could have been given the authority, perhaps after consultation with the house leaders of the various parties, to set a reasonable time limit on debate, bearing in mind the weight of the amendments. This would have been a perfectly reasonable

accommodation which would have been made if the government had not been determined to put this stupid, unworkable rule on the order paper.

I agree with the Prime Minister that parliament will not go to pot by the introduction of 75c. The people of Canada will make sure that in the future there will be the kind of government in this House of Commons that will protect parliamentary and democratic rights.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: I said that I wanted to say something about my own attitude. I tell you frankly, Mr. Speaker, that I do not get excited about rules, as some people do.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Lewis: I do not think that one particular rule or another will do this or that, in the long run, for the Canadian people. I do not have a technocratic approach to this question. I do not think we will settle the problems of Canada and the Canadian people by setting up a framework and believing that everything else will magically fall into place. This seems to be the belief of the Prime Minister. I do not believe in that kind of thing.

All the time we have spent on this question would not have been worthwhile if it were not for the fact that the government would not even look at the rule which the committee report proposes and see how stupid and unworkable it is, how it is designed to invite chaos in future sessions of this parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: We are not discussing limitation of time in the abstract; we are discussing a particular rule which is before us. Rule 75B provides that if a majority of the parties in the house agree on something, there is an agreement.

An hon. Member: Brilliant!

Mr. Lewis: Unless there is no agreement, 75c cannot be imposed. I would, as a lawyer, be prepared to bet a great deal on whatever reputation I have in that realm that if the three opposition parties wanted to agree every time, they would produce an agreement under 75B and the President of the Privy Council would be unable to say to Mr. Speaker, "No agreement has been reached with regard to this piece of legislation". The government recognizes that.