

Business of the House

Since it is the government's program, the government must take the responsibility for taking steps to put it through parliament. At the same time, the Commons must be in a position to resist arbitrary actions and to attempt to mobilize public opinion.

These two principles are well accepted. As a parliamentarian of more recent vintage than the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands, I hope they will guide this House in the future when both hon. members will not be with us.

In Canada, the principal battle on a bill has usually been fought at the second reading stage. This makes little sense since the second reading stage is really merely a motion to refer a bill to a committee.

Yesterday when dealing with a point of order on Bill C-83 the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre confirmed that view. He indicated that there are two portions to the second reading stage, second reading being the first, and referral to a committee the second. He attached quite a bit of importance to the latter part, namely, referral to a committee for study.

The quotation continues:

A delay at second reading not only creates log jams down the system, but it results in undue pressure on committees, when they get difficult bills, to proceed in a more hasty and more partisan manner, thereby detracting from the serious work of hearing representations and making amendments.

Here again this is crucial to the procedures of this House. The committee is set up with a limited number of members and is ready to deal with a specific subject matter. They are usually more informed with reference to the particular subject matter. I refer here to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. The committee will deal with this bill and receive representations from interested parties who wish to attend before the committee to testify in the hope of persuading the members of the committee to present a report different from what has been submitted to it for consideration.

I continue to quote:

The committee stage becomes a rather repetitive and boring (and unobserved) prelude for an equally repetitive and boring report stage, when the House is often asked to spend much time re-confirming the partisan positions taken in committee. Ironically, by the time the third reading stage is reached, i.e. the stage at which the House is asked the essential question, "Shall the bill pass?", opposition to a bill has usually worn itself out and, if there is any debate at this stage, it is a dreary dénouement. While the political effects of this system can be impressive, it usually does little to improve the bill and nothing to assist the over-all legislative program. The system to be sought should be aimed at preserving the political potentials but, at the same time, increasing the likelihood of improving the legislation.

That is fundamental to this debate. The facts are not in dispute. This bill has been before the House for 11 different sittings. There have been 30 hours of debate on second reading.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Kaplan) indicated that after five additional hours of debate this bill will proceed to a committee. Every member of this House is permitted to attend the committee and to present amendments. Those amendments will be deliberated and voted upon. If they are unable to get the committee to accept the amendments, prior to the matter coming before this House at report stage, they can move any amendment that is in order.

[Mr. Blais.]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is in order.

Mr. Blais: Yes, that deals with the subject matter of the bill, including a motion to repeal or do away with a clause or to reject a whole clause within a particular bill.

● (1640)

We had the same experience when dealing with Bill C-68. Members on the government benches introduced at the report stage major amendments that were debated at length if not ad nauseam. After this particular matter is dealt with at that stage we will then proceed to third reading. This is not closure. This is simply an allocation of time on an elementary portion of the debate, second reading.

We have heard from the opposition, time and time again, expressions and mouthings of good intention relating to changes in the rules of this House. If the attitude manifested by speakers at this time is any indication of the success we will meet in effecting these major rule changes I am indeed very disappointed. The effect of what was said by the President of the Privy Council is not disputed by anyone. I am a parliamentarian and have a good deal of respect for this place, but I am also interested in having here a quality of debate which is worthy of the institution. Filibusters are not conducive to a high quality of debate despite the preachings we get from opposition members. We hear rantings, ravings, repetition, and remarks of absolutely no worth or weight.

Mr. McCleave: What about your raving?

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I heard the co-chairman of the Committee on Statutory Instruments, who was a deputy speaker of this House. He is well aware of the feelings in respect of the rules of procedure. I would expect him to agree with the view I expressed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the parliamentary secretary but his time has expired.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I was interested in the comments of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) when he stated that even at the time of the introduction of closure in the Borden years during the First World War more time was allowed for debate than there will be at this time. I think this is significant.

This is a very important piece of legislation. We really are starting all over again the medical care and hospital care debate. I suggest one of the great weaknesses of the government is that it has not brought forward a throne speech to indicate how it will react in respect of the financial, economic, and social life of the country. This is the longest period in which we have been without a throne speech. We have no indication concerning the direction in which we are headed. I think it is high time there was some direction.

The internal deficit of something in the order of \$6 billion is throwing some of the cost of programs on to the provinces. In addition there is an external deficit of something in the order of \$6 billion. This and the rise in the