

Business of the House

this bill for six days. I have the record of the debates in this House—Monday, March 8, four hours and 50 minutes; Tuesday, March 9, two hours and 35 minutes; Thursday, March 11, one hour and 25 minutes, and then nothing with respect to this bill—and it is he who chooses the legislation, not us—until Monday, March 29, when the matter was debated for 15 minutes. On Tuesday, March 30, it was debated for three hours and ten minutes, and on Wednesday, March 31, for two hours and 35 minutes. That, Mr. Speaker, is a total of 15 hours' debate on a matter that is of great public importance.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): If a normal, average day—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. With the noise on both sides it is very hard to follow the hon. member. This is a very emotional subject and I think hon. members should at least listen to the member who has the floor.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): If a normal, average day at this time of the year is put at three hours and 40 minutes—and that is the experience in terms of debate in this House—we have spent the equivalent of just over four days on Bill C-83. That is hardly any period of time to debate something of urgent and public importance, at least so important that it was put on the order paper and brought forward. The government House leader is attempting to indict the opposition for delaying this piece of legislation. Up to March 31, yesterday, there were 11 Liberal, 11 Progressive Conservative, 4 NDP and 4 Social Credit speakers. If there was ever an indication that a piece of legislation has engaged the attention of members on all sides of the House, it is the record I have just quoted. If there was ever an indication that debate on a piece of legislation ought not to be cut off before running its normal course, it is this.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): This was introduced as a peace and security program. It is part of a whole package of legislation that includes a government proposal for the abolition of capital punishment. This government is putting forward an alternative when it asks this country to go with it and abolish capital punishment. If that abolition is important to this government, then I say this government ought not cut off debate on one important aspect of the whole package it is asking parliament and this country to accept. This parliament and this country is not prepared to accept this kind of untoward muzzling on matters which are so important that they are likely to engage the time of the House until the end of this session.

Mr. Blais: Do you want to sit in July?

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The choice as to whether we sit in July rests with the government House leader and his colleagues, and not with anyone else. In fact, I

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

think it would be a much more pleasant July if the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) went home.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this government ought to know better, four times they have gone to the plate with respect to closure, and they are about to strike out for the fourth time. The people of Canada are not going to forget what this government is trying to do to this parliament in terms of legislation which is so important that it has generated the greatest amount of mail on any subject since many members have been here, including many who have been here much longer than I have. I cannot understand what motivates this government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are thoroughly opposed to this motion. Before he sat down, the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) said that he could not understand what motivates the government to bring in a motion of this kind. I can only conclude that the government is stupid.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): In the course of his remarks, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) said that he hoped it would be possible more often to fix the time of debate by agreement among the parties. The implication of that statement is that what we are doing today is fixing the time of debate by agreement among the parties, and that is not true. Neither was it true with regard to Bill C-73, Bill C-58 or Bill C-68. This is another case of the government using its authority, its majority and its brute force to tell this parliament what it shall do.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): As has often been said from the chair, this is a place of debate. It is a place of confrontation, where issues are involved. However, I suggest that when it comes to arranging the business of the House and arranging how we will use our time, that ought not to be done by debate and confrontation. It ought to be done by understanding, consultation and agreement.

● (1610)

I hope to be in this place long enough to see the day when we shall arrange the time of the House by consultation, understanding and agreement. But every time the President of the Privy Council moves a motion under 75scc he puts off the day of understanding or agreement. In effect, he says he cannot wait for the business of the House to be arranged in that way; he has the power, he has a majority, and so he uses a form of closure. Every time this is done, it not only raises questions about the immediate issue under debate but it delays the day when we can come to some sensible arrangement about the conduct of business.

An hon. Member: Not with you here.