

Motion for Concurrence in Report

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the standing committee on finance, trade and economic affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): It being seven o'clock I do now leave the chair.

At seven o'clock the house took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The house resumed at 8 p.m.

PROCEDURE**MOTION FOR CONCURRENCE IN FOURTH REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

The house resumed consideration of the following motion (Mr. Blair):

That the fourth report of the special committee on procedure of the house, presented to the house on Friday, December 6, 1968, be concurred in.

And the amendment thereto of Mr. Stanfield.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): In my remarks prior to six o'clock, Mr. Speaker, I had endeavoured to make it clear that we in this party are strongly in favour of procedural reform, and in particular that we think the major area in which we need to deal with our rules is that which concerns the use of time. We support most of the proposals which have been made in the reports of our special committee, because for the most part they are directed to that very problem. I hope I also made it clear that we are not entering upon this debate as though it were so much fun and games, but rather that we want almost all of the proposed rule reforms to become part of the standing orders of this house.

I made it equally clear that there is one proposal in the fourth report which we regard as iniquitous, inasmuch as it is inimical to the whole parliamentary process and that, like the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), we are determined that standing order 16-A in its present form at least shall not find a place in the rules of this House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I might take a moment longer to say there are certain specific objections to this rule. First of all the whole idea that a committee of four can function with the attendance of only one [The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard).]

person is opposed to every concept of the democratic process. Likewise, the suggestion that in a committee of four the will of one, even though the other three are opposed, can be brought forward as a report from that committee is unthinkable. If there is nothing else to be said about it, that is contrary to the spirit of the section in the British North America Act which says that decisions of the House of Commons are reached by a majority of the voices, not by a minority of one.

We are also opposed to the way in which standing order 16-A would work, because placed in the hands of the government house leader it could amount to closure in advance. I want to make it clear that we do not object to the planning in advance of the business of the house, when that planning is done by agreement, and particularly when it is done by unanimous agreement. But there is all the difference in the world between advance planning by way of agreement as to the use of time, and the right of the government house leader to bring in a proposal which imposes a limitation of time in advance applicable to all members of the house. If this rule goes through, there is certainly no point in retaining standing order 33, the old closure rule which was imposed on parliament back in 1913, because it will be tiddlywinks compared with the authority the government house leader will possess.

I should like to point out also that if this change is put into effect it must be for a purpose. And I know what that purpose is. It is to shorten the debates which take place on the floor of the House of Commons. The government's hand has been shown. The government believes in short debates—one day debates—and this is something the extension of which I believe we ought not to stand for in this House of Commons. Better have no debate at all than any more of these one day debates which amount to nothing more than a round of statements by party leaders or front bench spokesmen. As for the backbenchers on both sides of the house, they might as well go home.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): According to this process of thinking, all the backbenchers need to do is give power of attorney to the front benchers to vote on their behalf from time to time to approve the government's programs.

I believe there is still something to the concept of debate. I hope we shall put it into