

for second reading because, although it has been expected by hon. members of the opposition, there was a belief that perhaps some time would be required in order to ascertain the full impact of the bill. Subsequently, at the request of the opposition House leader, an additional week was permitted so that public opinion would be allowed to jell, so we did not begin second reading until March 8.

The purpose in not beginning before March 8 was to permit hon. members of the opposition and government backbenchers to communicate with their constituents so that their constituents might be informed about the provisions of the bill. I am not responsible for any delinquency on the part of some hon. members of the opposition in failing to communicate with their constituents and advise them on the provisions of this bill and to obtain replies from them.

Initially when I became aware of this bill I insisted upon communicating its provisions to everyone in my riding who was interested. As a matter of fact I have been in constant communication with most of my constituents interested in gun control and other aspects of this legislation for the better part of 18 months. As it stands, I am now replying to replies received from people in my constituency, so in effect the matter has jelled in the minds of constituents in the riding of Nipissing. I might indicate that they are willing and ready to make representations so that those representations can be dealt with when the matter goes before the Committee.

I suggest that now is the time to pass this bill at second reading and send it to committee. To the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), who is concerned about not speaking on this bill because of this motion, I say that when he speaks to his party whip the superiority of his remarks will permit him to be recognized within his caucus, and in the event that his whip feels that his remarks are superior to those of other hon. members of his party, he will be heard. Of course I doubt very much that that will be the case.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, this debate demonstrates beyond any doubt that Standing Order 75C is not working. I am not talking about Standing Order 75, because we have Standing Order 75A and 75B. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) knows full well that when we brought in these rule changes back in 1968 it was the understanding of the House during that debate, notwithstanding the fact that this particular provision of the rules was itself brought in by closure, that Standing Order 75C would only be used on the rarest of occasions, and rightly so, because we are talking about closure.

We know the history of closure in this House. We know what it did to the Liberal Party in 1956, and it went on to pay for it in 1957. However, there is a whole new element entering into the use of the principle of closure, and that is the application of closure when there is no apparent urgency. The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) pointed out that we have spent barely six days on this bill. If we equate that to full parliamentary days, it works out to about three days or a total of 15 hours, and now we will have closure. As a consequence of this measure before the

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House and the vote which will follow we will be told that we have only four more days of debate.

I listened with great interest to the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Blais). It is not often he gets a chance to take off in full flight as he did today, and perhaps that is a good thing because I know the pent up frustration of the hon. member who has an opportunity in this House only to say no.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: He is the original Dr. No. I can imagine the parliamentary secretary having a nightmare one of these days and waking up in the middle of his sleep saying, "Yes, yes, yes".

An hon. Member: To his wife, I hope.

Mr. McGrath: Just think how many worth-while measures have been cut off by the indiscriminate use of the prerogative of the parliamentary secretary to withhold unanimous consent under Standing Order 43.

I listened very carefully to what the parliamentary secretary said. He said that each and every member in this House is equal in status, and I could not agree with him more. Each and every member of this House is equal in status, yet by the very motion of closure which has been introduced in this House the government is denying us the right to participate at second reading of this bill.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I have the right to speak at second reading of this bill. Every hon. member of this House has that right, if he feels so inclined. I submit that there has not been a bill which has come before this House in a long time which has aroused public interest to the extent this measure has, in my recent knowledge, and there has been no measure which has generated more mail than this bill.

It is only right that each member who has to deal with his constituents, who has to answer to his constituents and has to account for his actions in this House—if he feels so inclined and if he feels that he has a responsibility to his constituents—should have a right at second reading of a bill to stand in his place and speak on behalf of his constituents. We are being denied that right.

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford), when he participated in this debate, said that second reading was only a debate on principle. I am not going to argue that. We are operating under new rules; we have new procedures for the passage of bills in this House; we have committee stage and report stage. Debate on the principle of a bill has always been an important part of our parliamentary procedure, has always been an important prelude before a bill is sent to committee. It sets the state for the examination which is to follow in committee.

● (2010)

This afternoon I listened with amazement to the Minister of Justice saying that it is time we sent the bill to committee so that witnesses can be heard. I say to the Minister of Justice and to the government House leader that members of parliament have the right to be heard