

Business of the House

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Yes, two speakers a day for about 20 minutes each. I think that is very generous of them. As a result of their generosity and of the fact that there seems to be, as we go on, a shortening of speaking time, I have no doubt at all that there will be ample House time for all Members of Parliament to speak on the Constitution package. I want to thank the government for its generosity because I think that at last the light is dawning upon them that indeed the Constitution is important. However, notwithstanding the fact that members are entitled to use 40 minutes in making their speeches, most of them are not using that time. The government is applying itself quite appropriately to allowing members of the House of Commons to speak, those members who wish to speak and were denied the opportunity before by the government's act of closure. I hope this change of heart on the part of the government will be continued and that there will be no need hereafter to negotiate in public with respect to House leaders' matters.

● (1520)

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I hope our example will be followed by members of the Conservative Party and that they will voluntarily limit themselves to 20-minute speeches as well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: Madam Speaker, I should like to make a comment or two with respect to the matter under discussion. First, may I say to the President of the Privy Council that I was somewhat surprised when he said the New Democratic Party should also be seized of the offer. I do not quite know what "seized" means in that context but, as he knows, the last time this matter was discussed on the floor of the House of Commons I indicated our party was prepared to go for shorter speeches and for additional hours in the week so that as many members as possible might speak. Although we hold our House leaders' meetings in camera, some of these things have got out. He also knows that whatever the others have said at our meeting, I have said that we are prepared to agree to 20-minute speeches for the rest of the debate on the Constitution and that we are also prepared for additional hours.

We think the suggestion of adding ten hours per week is a bit much. We have suggested six, but we are prepared to negotiate the number of hours. Like the President of the Privy Council, we are prepared to negotiate 25 minutes if that is what it must be; certainly it is better than 40. At any rate, we are asking that this matter continue to be considered.

I should also like to express the hope that some time soon there be an understanding under which we could have a vote on the amendment of the hon. member for Provencher which is now before the House. As has been indicated, there are a number of members with amendments they would like to make. It has been suggested that the Progressive Conservative Party has other amendments; we have two or three we should like to make. But if we continue debating the amendment before the House, it could be spring or summer before we get a chance to put up other amendments.

I say to hon. members who are making their main speeches that they could make their speeches just as well on the motion with another amendment as they can make it on the motion with the present amendment. I am not asking for a House order. I am just expressing a hope, as I have expressed privately to members to my right, that they might soon let the vote come on the amendment of the hon. member for Provencher. It seems to me this would give a chance to this party and to other members in the other parties to get amendments before the House. Otherwise, as matters stand, as long as that amendment is there no other amendment can be moved.

Here we are again discussing these things in public, but it got started that way. I hope we can come to some understanding. We are prepared for shorter speeches and for a few additional hours during the week.

While I am on my feet dealing with House business, I should like to refer to a couple of other matters. First, I believe, having discussed the matter with my colleagues, that we can do a number of things tomorrow along the lines suggested by the government House leader. We may not get all of that work done, but I think we can do fairly well. I join with the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton in expressing the hope that Bill C-60 might be brought forward very soon. We understand that all it does is to make changes in the arrangements for expropriation of land out west where the pipeline is being built. We want to see those changes; we could pass that bill quickly.

The other bill to which I should like to refer is Bill C-42 to turn the Post Office into a Crown corporation. Some of us were quite concerned for a few weeks that the failure to get the bill through might result in a letter carriers' strike. Apparently that will not take place. While there is some time available, I would hope that we might get Bill C-42 before us. The crucial thing about the bill is that when it was in committee the Postmaster General said that he was willing to accept the amendment to the bill proposed by the representative of the workers. When it was not possible to do that in committee because the matter had not been before cabinet, he made the offer to put that amendment down at report stage. I hope that will now be done. We have a little time, since apparently there is to be no strike. The Postmaster General promised in committee to take that amendment to cabinet for cabinet approval and to put it on the Order Paper. It is another bill with which we could deal rather quickly. As for Bill C-60, if it is put on the list we can deal with it very fast; but we also want to see action on Bill C-42.

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I take note of the suggestions of the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre concerning Bill C-60. If they want to deal with it through all stages tomorrow, I am in a position to tell them that I will bring that bill up for discussion. I am willing to discuss that later on this afternoon.

I could accept the replacement of Bill C-58, dealing with the Canada Elections Act, with Bill C-60 so that we could deal with the bill before the end of the afternoon, after dealing with the student loans bill and the Judges Act.