

Procedure and Organization

bill, and with the exception of the combination of report stage and third reading it is applied only to a single stage of a single bill.

The way in which the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair) described it in his second formulation was correct, when he described it as requiring the lapse of at least ten days before the full rule could be worked in detail. In fact, under our procedures I would suggest that as a minimum much more than ten days would be required. This is because, as hon. members know, there is now a rule of the house that unless a special order is made the committee stage of public bills is automatically conducted in a standing committee, and the experience we have of our standing committees during the course of this session is that it is has taken them two to three weeks to deal with major bills. What is more, under our Standing Orders the report stage of a bill cannot be called until at least 48 hours have elapsed from the time the report is received from the standing committee. In fact, and in accordance with our experience in the house, many more than ten days will elapse before all the various stages of a bill are gone through.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Under this proposal how long will a bill be before a standing committee? That time can also be reduced to one day.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): It can indeed, although I think what we have to talk about is the reality of life and, to repeat again what Mr. St. Laurent said, this is the way public bills have been dealt with. I would point out to the hon. member that up until now we have in fact been in the position in standing committees, merely by the use of a majority, to bring debate in committees to an end, but that has not happened. I would suggest that the practical way in which this proposed rule will be operated in the house is that there will certainly be at least one month's time before a bill goes through all its stages.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Do I take it from the minister's remarks that he would be prepared to take out of this proposed rule the one day application in reference to the committee stage?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Well, it is a worth-while suggestion and I would agree it follows naturally from my remarks, but perhaps at this point I could put forward the general principles which I think should apply to the writing of a time limit into a bill. I agree that four days on all stages of an

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

important bill may be far too short, but writing in four days may be far too long for many less important bills, and one of the facts of life in this house is that when you have this kind of minimum time limit then, whether it is necessary or not, the debate expands to fill the time limit. So I think it is a reasonable safeguard to have one sitting day although in fact, under the procedures followed in the house, committee stage on occasion has taken many more days than one sitting day.

Mr. Bell: And hasn't it worked? I ask that as a serious question. Would the minister not admit that report stage and committee stage have worked this session?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): No. I point out to the hon. member that it is the specific weakness in our procedures with regard to the report stage that makes it necessary that we have this provision now. The experience has been that under the arrangements we made for the rules at Christmas time we have put more reasonable time limits on second reading and third reading, but the experience has also been that where there is an uncontrolled stage the debate tends to shift over into it and grow there. Therefore we are trying to provide for that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the house last gave major consideration to this basic question of programming the time of the house and we were considering the proposed new rule 16A, the complaint was made that it would provide for an order with regard to more than one bill and more than one stage of a single bill. What the present proposed rule does is provide that on three different occasions the government will have to come into the house to seek an order of the house, after a two hour debate, on the manner in which time is to be allocated. In other words, there will have to be three separate applications for such an order, and to that extent the objections to 16A have been met. In addition, we have stipulated—and this was a matter of some considerable negotiation in the committee—a minimum of one day's debate at each of the three stages.

● (5:20 p.m.)

The second objection made to the previous proposal with regard to time allocation was that it would be possible to limit the debate on a bill at all stages even before the debate had started. Because of the one stage provision that, of course, is no longer possible and