

Business of the House

today. I was only putting this proposal on the floor of the House in the hope that perhaps tomorrow, when we give notice of our resolution, my colleagues on the other side would be in a position to confirm quicker that such a proposal gives nothing more to the government, but in fact is just a measure to please members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Madam Speaker, we are discussing this in an atmosphere of the House which is now soured by the fact that the next matter with which we will be dealing is a motion to cut off debate on a borrowing bill.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Shame.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Also, we are dealing with a matter wherein the Prime Minister promised the fullest debate and participation of all members. Then, after he made that promise, he lowered the boom of closure on the debate. Now we are discussing it again when an obviously mischievous question—

Some hon. Members: Order, order.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The government House leader, I, and everyone who thinks about it, know that extension of time is another form of closure.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): This is a closure-crazy government; this is a closure-crazy government.

We are dealing now with something which is rather important to every member of the House of Commons. The rules of practice of the House of Commons were designed to give all members ample right to participate. It is in the light of the intention of those rules that we will judge our conduct, not by some artificial time limit set by an arrogant Prime Minister with respect to the Constitution of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, I do not understand why my hon. colleague, whom I respect very much, loses his temper or cool. After all, I am only making a proposal to him; he does not have to accept it. It is just a matter of wanting members to participate. If he prefers to adopt another attitude, let the public judge. I think there was nothing wrong in what I said. There was nothing that intended to limit debate at this stage. I was only trying to be helpful so that the opposition could participate more in the conclusion of the debate. Obviously, I cannot agree with the reaction of my hon. colleague to our proposal.

Mr. Nielsen: It was devious.

Mr. Pinard: I think the NDP would welcome a suggestion—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pinard:—that would give more members an opportunity to participate in the debate at this stage after four months and that would allow the House to proceed with other urgent business with which we are faced in this nation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: It is a very uncivilized way of proceeding.

Mr. Knowles: Madam Speaker, first may I say I was pleased to hear the government House leader say that the debate on the Constitution could be interrupted for a day, now and then, if there was something important for the House to deal with, particularly if there was something with which we could deal quickly. He knows what that suggests to me, namely, if there is a piece of legislation from the Minister of Veterans affairs which the House could pass quickly, as I know it will, I hope he will bring it in.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: I should like to say a word or two on the other subject, and I am quite cool, calm and collected in saying it. In our party we feel that the upcoming debate on the Constitution is an extremely important one, and that every member of the House who wishes to speak should have the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Crosbie: Right on.

Mr. Knowles: Toward that end we think consideration should be given—

Mr. Crosbie: Oh!

Mr. Knowles:—to shorter speeches and to extra hours.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: I do not happen to agree with the suggestion of ten extra hours per week, but I think extra hours should be made available. The debate would be sharper and the public would understand it better if we had 20-minute speeches instead of 40-minute speeches.

● (1520)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: Cuddle up a little closer.

Mr. Knowles: That gets applause from the government side of the House but now may I say that I agree with the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton that this is something we should negotiate as House leaders rather than here on the floor of the House. But I say that, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, that in those negotiations we will be prepared to consider changes for this debate in our rules to enable the largest possible number of members to speak and to facilitate a good, sharp, clear debate.

Mr. Mayer: Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the exchange between the government House leader and the hon.