

great importance or complexity, but because of their urgency. Sometimes a deadline must be met. Interest rate provisions may have to be changed to keep an act in operation. We may have an international obligation to change a law by a particular date. The result is that intrinsically more important bills are dealt with hastily in the waning days of the session, and, what is worse, some important proposals may never even become bills at all.

Something similar often happens during the various stages of debate of a bill. Days are consumed on the second reading debate and on the first few clauses. Then interest lags, and the tough and technical clauses, the ones that need intensive study, slide by untested.

There are the sins of omission. These are the cruelest closures: Closure by neglect and closure by exclusion.

It is not even possible under our present system to assign full responsibility for these omissions. We spend a great deal of time in this house blaming each other for them. Surely it would be an improvement to assign responsibility for the use of time and to know whom to blame for its misuse.

Under our system, responsibility for the content of legislation clearly rests with the government. In case of disagreement among the parties, the responsibility for making a proposal on proceedings to the house must also rest with the government. The proposed rules would make this equally clear.

To recognize that the government has a right to make a proposal to the house on its proceedings must not be thought to reduce the dependence of the government on the house. Nor does it diminish the right of those in opposition to test, and test again, the attitude of the house to the government. The proposals before us would allow the government, when there is no voluntary agreement among the parties, to propose a timetable to ensure adequate discussion of all parts of a bill. This timetable would itself be submitted to a vote in the house; and let us not forget that the proposed rules would also provide the opposition with better opportunities throughout each session to bring on votes of no confidence in the government. The proposals would maintain a balance at all times between the government's legitimate desire to meet its responsibilities to the country, and the opposition's legitimate desire to test the support for the government in this house.

This balance is assured in proposed standing order 56 which sets a timetable for the annual session. The special committee has

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suggested that, if the house is to do its financial and legislative work during a regular annual cycle, the sessions normally should start in September or October. This would enable the government to complete its legislative program during the summer months. By the time the house convenes, a substantial number of bills would be ready for first reading. The bulk of the legislative work would be undertaken in the autumn and early winter. The house would be able to concentrate on the main financial work in the spring and to complete it before a summer adjournment. During each of three periods of the proposed annual session a fixed number of days would be set aside for the opposition. These are the days allotted for the business of supply.

As members know, we now divide the business of supply into two parts. One part is debate on supply motions. The other is the examination of the estimates by the committee of supply. A supply motion is for the Speaker to leave the chair so that the house may go into committee of supply. Amendments of which no notice is given, are moved, and these regularly entail the question of confidence of the house in the ministry. The standing orders in effect in 1962 provided for six debatable supply motions. The standing orders in effect provisionally in 1967-68 provided for four debatable supply motions.

The use of supply motions as the main opportunity for the opposition to show the shortcomings of the government—apart from the debates on the throne speech and on the budget—has been criticized on three grounds:

First, because under this system the opposition can initiate debates on only four or six topics chosen by itself during an annual session;

Second, because in a normal session these debates tend to be concentrated into one or two short periods; and,

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Third, the two day supply motion debates are not used economically due to the lack of notice and the early hour of the division on the second day. To meet these criticisms, the opposition should be given better opportunities than the supply motion debates, either to raise important subjects for debate or to reveal the alleged errors of the minister. These are provided by the provisions of the proposed standing order 56, to which I will refer in a moment.