

House of Commons Procedures

The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin) was asked a question and almost 15 minutes were used up by the various leaders asking questions. Where does the backbencher come in with pertinent questions?

Mr. Nesbitt: Fifteen minutes was used up by the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Mr. Pugh: Yes. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, if we have a limitation, should we not have a limitation on the answers given by Ministers? It is not that I think we could ever close off the Secretary of State for External Affairs; it would indeed be a strange thing for him to rise and make a concise statement in one minute.

An hon. Member: Without adjectives.

Mr. Pugh: Without adjectives. There is one other point in this connection, Mr. Speaker. If the Government did put on a time limit there is no question in my mind that, just as was done in the flag debate, the moment closure was brought in the Government Members would get up and take equal time with the rest of the House. As Chairman of the Flag Committee at that time, Mr. Speaker, you will know that what I am saying is precisely correct. The Government sat silent, the backbenchers hardly making a speech in all that time; in fact they pointed with pride to the fact that they had not made a speech. Then the moment closure was put on they rose and mealmouthed their way through, not saying anything but taking up the time of the House. This is something against which we must guard.

In general—I am just finishing, Mr. Speaker—and coming back to the Prime Minister's statement that such a change would not be a departure from the function of democracy as it is and that it would go some way toward reconciling the right of discussion with the right of decision, may I say at once that I do not believe again that any time limit is necessary or desirable. However, if the Government is going to force on us a time limit, I find myself in the position of having to vote for the amendment so that a decision of at least 60 per cent of all Members present when the vote is taken will be necessary to put this rather iniquitous legislation into effect.

Mr. Nesbitt: It is closure.

Mr. Pugh: Yes, it is closure. An excellent speech was made Friday by the hon. Member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr.

[Mr. Pugh.]

Churchill), who pointed out that closure, the guillotine, closure by compartment or time limitation in debate are, according to the best authorities in Britain, one and the same thing. Closure, the guillotine, compartmenting or setting a specific time on certain debates are one and the same thing. These terms in the view of the most eminent authority in Britain are synonymous.

Mr. Speaker, I believe I have made myself reasonably clear and have expressed my feelings in a way that the House will understand. I wish to say in conclusion that this rather horrible example of blackmail put forward by the President of the Privy Council may have been only innocent kite flying on the parliamentary green. But I cannot help but think, knowing the hon. Member well, that every word he said as quoted in the *Toronto Star* of today's date means one thing and one thing only, that this Government is not impressed by any words of the backbenchers in exactly the same manner that they are not impressed, with their bureaucratic attitude, by one word that is said by any businessman, economist or what-have-you throughout the whole of this great Dominion of Canada.

Mr. Stuart A. Fleming (Okanagan-Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, I am impelled to enter this debate not because I can qualify as an expert on the rules of the House but because from what I have seen here I have come to understand, and find myself in the position of not being able to believe, if I may borrow a phrase, that rather famous quotation, "The silence of pure innocence persuades when speaking fails". The innocence of our objective and purpose has obviously failed up to this point and therefore a little more speech is obviously necessary. It may go on for some time because, like my hon. friend and colleague from Okanagan Boundary, I was surprised by the headline in the *Toronto Star* of today, the one printed in red, the red herring red, this admission of failure of policy, the substitution of blackmail for argument. Every time the Opposition has put up any opposition in this House in recent years and the Government has found itself not getting its own way it has said to the Opposition, "Quieten down. Be good. Don't oppose or you will have an election". But the Government has said it too often.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Nesbitt: You are just a bunch of blackmailers over there, that's all.