

Proposal for Time Allocation

Mr. Pearson: My hon. friend says: "Postpone the bill." Postpone consideration of unification which was first put before members of the House of Commons in March 1964.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Nonsense.

Mr. Churchill: When did the bill come before us?

Mr. Pearson: We do not understand that. We think we would be derelict in our duty toward all the other things we ought to be doing in this house if we added to the time that has already been given in this house for the consideration of this bill. It has been said this afternoon and it has been said previously that the allocation of time and the way this motion is being put before the house are an undue limitation on the rights of parliament for free discussion of an important and controversial issue, as undoubtedly this one is, and very strong views are genuinely held by those against and those in favour of this bill. The charge, I think, is legitimate in the sense that it must be met.

How long has discussion gone on concerning this important measure? The figures have been put on the record before and I do not apologize for putting them on the record now. This bill, or this question, has been before the house in this session in one form or another for 27 days and the standing committee on national defence met on the bill on 26 days. This amounts, Mr. Speaker, to 53 days of discussion on this question in this session. I do not include in my total the three days spent largely on this subject on supply in February, 1966, nor will I include the 14 days on which this subject was discussed with varying degrees of intensity when the standing committee on national defence was considering the estimates for 1966-67 in May and June, 1966.

• (4:20 p.m.)

In case anyone should wish to examine my analysis of these statistics it is as follows: in the House of Commons, second reading, five days; in committee of the whole, 13 days; in interim supply, nine days, making a total of 27 days; in the standing committee on national defence on Bill C-243, 26 days. That seems to me to be an adequate time for consideration to be given even to a bill as important as this one.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Would the Prime Minister permit a question? He has indicated the time taken to consider this measure. Would he explain why the Minister

[Mr. Churchill.]

of National Defence found it regrettable that more witnesses were not called before the committee?

Mr. Pearson: I am indicating the amount of time which was made available to hon. members of the house and the committee for discussion of this bill and producing witnesses to take part in that discussion.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Would the Prime Minister answer the question?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has the floor.

Mr. Pearson: I wish to pass now to another aspect of this question, one to which I alluded at the beginning of my remarks. I should like to make as clear as I can the stark reality of our parliamentary situation in regard to the time we have already spent on legislation and on other proposals this year and the time which will be needed to do the things which should be done, some of which are already on the order paper and others of which have been announced.

Before each session of parliament, as the right hon. gentleman knows, having been head of the government, all departments are asked to indicate what legislative measures are required together with an opinion as to their importance and priority. When this was done for the opening of this present session so long ago in January, 1966, a larger number of proposals than usual were put forward as being important and urgent because it had not been possible to deal with them in earlier sessions.

At the beginning of this session the cabinet reduced the list to those items of which parliamentary approval might reasonably be expected and which in our view warranted the highest priority. These appeared in the Speech from the Throne on January 10, 1966. The list did not by any means include all the legislation which was considered to be urgent or important or both. For instance, that particular list did not include amendments to the Canada Water Conservation Assistance Act, amendments to the National Parks Act, revision of the Expropriation Act, revision of the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act, amendments to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, amendments to the Immigration Act and over 15 other pieces of legislation which were considered at that time to be desirable. These were all bills which in our view were needed to meet the national requirements and improve national life. Yet, as