

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PROCEDURE AND ORGANIZATION

MOTION FOR CONCURRENCE IN THIRD REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

The house resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Blair that the third report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, presented to the house on Friday, June 20, 1969, be concurred in.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): The Speaker, it is the arrogance of the government that sticks in my crop. In July the place to play the numbers game is at country fairs and not in the House of Commons. The minister who has just spoken knows perfectly well that the committee on which we served held meetings all through the spring, and it was not until he served his ultimatum in May that we realized that he and the government were determined to bring on a form of closure which had proved to be such an impossible plan last December.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): May I ask the hon. member a question? Is it not a fact that by general consent of the committee the question of the allocation of time was left over to be dealt with in the latter part of the session while other matters, such as the committee system, were dealt with? At all times hon. members knew that this was something which we felt the house would have to deal with in this session.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We thought you would be reasonable.

Mr. Fairweather: That is the point. We made a mistake, and that is the problem with this motion. Because some people in this parliament are reasonable we had expected that we would not be faced with such an arrogant proposal. We went on to discuss other issues upon which agreement could readily be reached.

• (5:50 p.m.)

If we are in the game of reading editorials I suppose it is only fair to give measure for measure. I shall not go through a long preamble as to which party the *Ottawa Citizen* usually supports but, by coincidence, on the same day the *Toronto Telegram* was giving the minister the benefit of its editorial excellence there appeared an editorial in the *Citizen* entitled "Rights Imperilled". Not a bad day, July 4, considering the significance of that date in the history of this continent.

Procedure and Organization

Criticizing the closure rule as being too drastic, the article reads:

It is no accident that the government decided to wait until the dying hours of the present session to introduce its new closure rule—and that is what rule 75-C is.

The apparent fatigue of all members might help the government slip it through. But the weapon will backfire if the opposition remains determined to fight.

No parliamentarians can become as intractable, as unwilling to compromise, as those who are tired, who want to go home, but can't because they feel put upon and must stay to do battle. Much of the good work accomplished in gaining opposition co-operation to speed the work of parliament may be undone if the government keeps to its course.

The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) raised this important question in his contribution to the debate. The article continues:

When a majority of the house leaders cannot agree on a time limit for debate on a bill, rule 75-C would permit the government to impose a limit of one day at each stage. The result could be a mockery of parliament's rights.

It is impossible for the President of the Privy Council to admit what the ultimate result of this change would be, because he finds it inconvenient to share this information. He talks about meaningful debate. Certainly we could have a meaningful debate if the facts were given frankly. I return to the editorial.

The opposition should be given reasonable time—perhaps two or three weeks—to rally public opinion against legislation it considers iniquitous. If, after that, the public is still unmoved by opposition arguments, further debate becomes wilful obstruction. Closure can then be imposed without the taint of dictatorship.

That is a frank editorial and I read it in totality, which all too often is not the practice here. The minister speaks of the difficulty he would face in connection with the closure rule, rule 33. Surely it is within the capacity of the ministry and its programming department to put before parliament a reasonable amendment to that rule.

No matter what numbers game the minister plays the rules are not the property of the government of Canada. They are the property of individual members of this house. I presume we shall hear this from speaker after speaker. They are the property not only of members who belong to large parties but of those who belong to the smaller parties, even to those who may be independents. It is the rules of parliament that we are debating, and it is because these rules were not altogether acceptable to the members who make up this parliament that we are engaged in the present exercise of altering them.