

National Defence Act Amendment

intention to have in declared law until another six months have passed and the regulations have been drawn up. Therefore it would not seem that there is any urgent necessity to get this bill through the house at the present time. That argument seems, as one might say, to have been knocked into a cocked hat. There just is no reason for doing it.

I believe this government has its own reasons for invoking closure. From the government point of view I think the reasons probably are rather good. The minister, and when he is not here his associate minister, either cannot or will not answer questions. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has developed quite a reputation in this house for some time as a master in circumlocution, but the Minister of National Defence when he does answer questions makes the Secretary of State for External Affairs seem informative and concise by comparison. I think his failure to answer these questions adequately, has been the source of considerable embarrassment to the government. This has been pointed out very well by editorials which have appeared in a number of prominent newspapers in this country, including the *Montreal Gazette* of last Saturday, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Winnipeg Free Press* and others. They have all pointed out that the purpose of this bill and everything connected with it is unclear and murky. This is not surprising in view of the minister's failure to answer questions adequately.

• (6:30 p.m.)

For that reason I think the government wants this debate to end as quickly as possible. It has also taken this point of view in respect of the desire, as announced by the Prime Minister, to have this session end and the centennial session commence. We have been told that this session should conclude by the end of this month. The centennial session would then begin and last through to the end of June or the early part of July. I am sure most members would like to see that happen.

But whose fault is it that we are again faced with a critical situation—if it is critical? I suggest this situation is the result of mishandling of the business of the house of the government.

Mr. Robichaud: Be serious.

Mr. Nesbitt: If the Minister of Fisheries would like to know the reasons behind that remark I will be glad to give them at this stage. It is quite clear that one might say the cabinet is made up of a number of prima

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

donnas who have pet projects they want pushed through the house. One cannot know the reasons because he cannot look into the minds of members of the government to ascertain their motivation. The Minister of National Health and Welfare threatened last year that he would resign if the medicare bill was not put through. That was an important measure, but certainly there was no urgency because it will not become law until 1968.

Last summer we dealt with the Canada Assistance Plan. That also was a very important measure but it was pushed through this house under the threat that we would have no vacation and that hon. members would not be able to return to their constituencies to carry out their normal duties. It was also suggested that we were holding up the extra assistance to be given the needy. That measure was passed last July, but it has not been put into effect anywhere in Canada, except in the province of Ontario, and even there only as of April 1 of this year. There was no great rush in that regard.

We are now faced with this measure which the minister said will not go into effect for at least four to six months. On the basis of the evidence given before the defence committee it may not be put into effect for two or three years. What is the hurry?

In my submission the business of this house has been mishandled by the government. I do not blame the government house leader because I should not like to have his job; it must be very difficult to arrange parliamentary business in an orderly way when this sort of thing is taking place. In any event those are the reasons for this lengthy session. The minister wants the bill put through in a hurry so the centennial session deadline can be met. It is no one's fault but the government's that this deadline cannot be met in an orderly way.

Another very strange development in relation to this bill now before us was the suggestion in a letter by the chairman of the government caucus to his constituents that undoubtedly it was going to be necessary to use closure. That suggestion was made before we had commenced this stage of consideration. Surely that is a strange way of doing things. Had the statement been made by a backbencher on the government side, or someone with little responsibility, I would not have thought much about it: But it was made by the chairman of the government caucus.

As a result of that statement coming to light the chairman of the caucus was taken to