

*Time Allocation for Bill C-30*

moments. A few seconds ago I heard the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) tell me: "Try to defend closure".

I should remind him and he knows quite well that the procedure now applied is not closure but a limitation of the debate. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to refer to our rules, he will note, Madam Speaker, if he carefully reads SO 33 that closure is imposed when an additional day of debate is required so that all questions will be put at 1 a.m. Such a procedure has seldom been used in the past even if it had been warranted, considering the behaviour of the official opposition. Anyway, we are not resorting to closure today but to the limitation of the debate, as provided for under SO 75c and, for explanation purposes, I think it is important to indicate under which circumstances these provisions are invoked.

Madam Speaker, people are aware that a bill must go through various stages before being adopted. When it is introduced for first reading there is no debate. The purpose is to have the bill printed. I feel that the public at large should know that. When the government decides later to call the second stage of the bill, the debate is on the principle of the bill, and once the principle has been adopted on division or with the unanimous support of all parties, the bill can, at a later stage, be examined in detail either by a standing committee or a committee of the whole, depending on the nature of the bill, one clause after the other, and it can be amended and then reported.

There is another stage during which a bill continues to be studied after second reading and the study in committee, and it is the report stage, and, as though that were not enough, Madam Speaker, there is still another stage at which the bill can be considered by all hon. members, and that is called third reading. So it is important at this time that the public at large watching us on television or otherwise following our proceedings in newspapers or from the gallery, know that the motion introduced today is moved not at the final stage but rather at second reading, a preliminary stage where it is the principle of the bill that is being discussed.

Before being able and allowed to ask the House to limit the debate at this stage to a given number of hours or additional days, there is an obligation for us, on the government side, to hold consultations beforehand with opposition parties, and the rule involved in such a case is paragraph A of Standing Order 75. Since this motion is moved under Standing Order 75c, it stands to reason that we also have Standing Orders 75A and 75B. So, Madam Speaker, before using SO 75c, we tried to apply SO 75A. What does this rule say? Under that Standing Order we ask the official spokesmen for the various parties in the House to have a meeting and discuss whether it is possible to reach an agreement on a set period of additional time to conclude discussion of a bill at one stage. I would like to point out that in the present case, I had this required meeting and discussion with my hon. colleagues and leaders of opposition parties, and unfortunately in this case, contrary to several

other instance; in the past where we reached understanding and agreement, in this particular case, for reasons that are known to them, we could not reach agreement on a given period of time before concluding the debate on second reading.

So we must turn to 75B, which says that lacking an agreement between all parties, a majority of parties could conclude an agreement to allow for a fixed period of time in which to conclude the debate on a given stage of a bill.

And unfortunately there was not a majority of the parties which agreed to limit debate on Bill C-30 at second reading stage. Consequently it was only after these two formalities were completed that the government could apply Standing Order 75c which makes it mandatory to give advance notice—which we did last week—of our intention to move the motion today, what we are doing now, a motion which is debatable for a period of two hours and according to which, as members can see for themselves, an additional day will be provided if the motion is passed by the House regarding the second reading stage of Bill C-30. What we are now doing is to debate this motion under Standing Order 75c, a motion of which notice was given last week and which is intended, in the absence of an agreement after negotiations between the parties, to put an end to the second reading stage of Bill C-30.

As we very well know, Madam Speaker, this legislation can be discussed in committee, also at the report stage, if needed, and further on third reading. So in no way is this closure, nor muzzling the opposition. So much less that we did not decide on this at the outset, when this bill that is quite simple was introduced. Quite the opposite, we waited until the legislation had been discussed much too long on second reading. We waited until five debating days had gone on, or almost, because the first day was very limited. So to be honest, it was four debating days. However, we computed the total time used by hon. members up till now on second reading. According to the research I had undertaken already eleven hours and 47 minutes have been used on the government's time, on the time of the House to discuss one bill, and this is quite abnormal, improper and totally unacceptable.

As I said, Madam Speaker, we are at the second reading stage, and at this point almost twelve hours' debating time have been used on the principle of the bill to discuss nearly every matter but the principle of Bill C-30 itself.

As you may recall, Madam Speaker, the legislation was introduced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen). He did this at the end of the evening, he spoke for five minutes and very clearly explained the principle of the bill, and in my view his remarks were complete, concise and quite adequate to explain what the bill is all about. The Minister of Finance deemed fit to use five minutes, and this was quite adequate.

He was followed by the official opposition critic, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), the previous minister of finance and he took a whole hour and 37 minutes, Madam Speaker, a considerable, unjustifiable and unaccept-