

Debating Time Allotment

calls for the adoption of rules 75A, 75B and 75C in almost exactly the same form as the rules spelled out in the committee's report but for the two minor changes that have already been noted. In other words, it is quite clear that what the government has sought to do is to amend the committee's report without going through the process of having that report referred back to the standing committee.

I submit that that is clearly a case of the government's seeking to do indirectly what it is not permitted to do directly. Such a devious course is not open to the ordinary members of this house and I do not think it should be open to the government. As I said a moment ago, when Your Honour is called upon to decide, on matters of procedure and rules, between the government and parliament, there is no question which side you should come down on: You should come down on the side of parliament.

• (2:50 p.m.)

Another point I want to make, which you might say is more a matter of privilege than a matter of order but which I think comes into the picture, is this: What is happening here is that the government is upstaging the committee. The President of the Privy Council seems to get a certain amount of satisfaction out of the fact that I take no responsibility for the report of the committee because I voted against it, as did all the members of the opposition, and then I come along and want the debate in the house to take place on the committee's report rather than on a motion made by the President of the Privy Council.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that even though I may attempt to defeat the motion of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair), I have a right, in a parliament which is putting all the emphasis that this parliament is on the work of the committees, to insist that a committee should not be upstaged by a government that wants to take things in its own hands and run parliament the way it wants to without regard for the wishes of parliament as a whole. Even though I may be opposed to the motion of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton and even though I may do everything I can to try to have it defeated, I still think I have the right as a member of parliament and as a member of that committee to ask that that be the vehicle by which this matter is brought before this House of Commons.

May I say if Your Honour finds this an extremely difficult decision to make and, as the President of the Privy Council suggested,

if Your Honour feels that you are getting into an area of substance rather than into the area of rules, I hope Your Honour will be very clear on the point that this matter cannot be debated under both motions. If Your Honour allows one, Your Honour certainly will not be able to allow the other. Therefore the issue becomes a very simple one, and Your Honour's ruling is crucial to this problem. Are we going to debate the changing of the rules of parliament on the basis of a study by an all-party committee, or are we going to debate the changing of the rules of parliament on the basis of a blatant government motion that has no regard for the tradition that the rules of this House of Commons belong not to the government, but to parliament as a whole? That is the issue, clear and simple.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West):

Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to get into an argument of anticipation or to review the arguments advanced by my colleagues on this side of the house. I simply want to draw to Your Honour's attention that the essence of the difficulty today in the government's position is that it is confusing the nature of the motion put on the order paper by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair).

That motion was to adopt a report by a committee of the house which was directed by the house to sit and to consider the matter referred to it. It is not merely a motion standing in the name of the hon. member in his own capacity: It is a direction from this house. I will reiterate the argument put forward by hon. members on this side, that the rules belong to this house. Frankly, I can only say that the government's motion as it now stands is in contempt of the house. The direction was by this house to bring in a report regarding the rules. This is what the committee did. I will not go into the specifics of that, nor the question that it was adopted on a majority view, or anything of that nature.

The committee reported back to the house as it was obligated to do. The government says: We will set that aside; we couldn't care less what the house is directing; the house is going to do what we say. Therefore in line with that kind of reasoning it is open to the government to take any committee report and, because it does not like it, introduce a motion so that such committee report shall stand bypassed, and then decide in what way it should be handled. Under the rules, Mr. Speaker, that is not the way to proceed.