

Debating Time Allotment

make parliament function more efficiently on the basis of the committee system, was just so much waste of time.

• (8:30 p.m.)

I agree completely with the position taken by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), stated again by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), that this is not just a one shot decision. This is not just some minor point because we are involved in a fight over procedure, and I regret it has come to that. It would be far better if we were doing things by agreement, but this point involves more than a procedural matter. This is a ruling that will affect the whole question of how our committee system is going to operate. I am one who believes this parliament will work better if its committees are upgraded and are treated as important, and if the members on them, whatever party they belong to, are respected for the work they do. You will ruin it all if this procedure is allowed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, my comments will be rather short.

Having heard the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) on the point of order of the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), we must draw some conclusions. Moreover, I was impressed by the argumentation of an expert in that field, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, especially when he stated that the work done in committee is becoming increasingly important.

Having read the reports of the proceedings of committees and studied the development of their work, I have come to the conclusion as did several of my colleagues that the work done in committee will have to be freed from the influence of certain ministers who wish to impose their views on the committees.

As a matter of fact, this is not the first time this year that we meet the same problem and we must agree that the point of order of the hon. member for Peace River is justified and acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, in the Votes and Proceedings of June 20 last, we read the following:

Mr. Blair, from the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, presented the Third Report of the said Committee, which is as follows:

Your Committee recommends—

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said, this was an unfortunate decision, but it was made by a majority of the committee. However, Mr. Speaker, there is something else with regard to the proceedings of the committee.

What about those proceedings? The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald), if I may use an expression I find very suitable in this instance, does not care a rap about that and goes his own way, just as if he was the one to decide, on behalf of the committee, of what it will do and how.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the ruling you will give presently is, according to the Ralliement créditiste, of the utmost importance, because it will establish, in fact, to what extent the report of a committee is really consistent with the wishes of its members or those of a particular minister.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of sitting on the committee on privileges and elections. Sometime this year, that committee studied a problem concerning one aspect of the field of transportation. It stemmed from a report of the committee on transport and communications which, according to some hon. members, was not consistent with the proceedings. Now, the President of the Privy Council intervened in the house a few days later, to dictate a ruling concerning the report of the committee on transport and communications.

Mr. Speaker, at that time, the President of the Privy Council anticipated on the decision of the committee on privileges and elections. He assumed powers that he did not have. He passed judgment, which he was not entitled to do, and thus put the members of the committee on privileges and elections in a very awkward position.

Mr. Speaker, it is therefore obvious that this situation has occurred time and time again, and that some day sooner or later a decision must be reached on the procedure to be followed. We feel that the time has come to decide to what extent the recommendations of a committee, since this procedure is becoming more and more important, must be decided upon independently of the will of the ministers. Otherwise, we will have to believe, or will be inclined to believe, that the will of the government with regard to the work in committee is the same as that which prompted it to propose Standing Order 75C which, to my mind, is dictatorial.

[*English*]

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me