

Procedure and Organization

Let the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) look at the order paper and be convinced in this regard. It is fair to point out that until now—and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre pointed this out himself—time limits have already been provided for in other aspects of house business, such as in the throne speech and budget debates and in the supply procedure for scrutinizing government spending. What is needed is some flexible procedure for dividing the time needed for public bills in a way that will ensure that each one is debated and brought to decision in that particular session.

As time goes on—and this is already evident in the order papers of recent years—the carrying on of the public business requires an increasingly large number of bills. For example, on the program for October there will be 83 measures which, of course, may be added to or subtracted from as time goes on. The fact that these 83 measures must be divided into approximately 155 to 160 sitting days that we have in our parliamentary calendar, and allowing for approximately 45 to 50 days of generalized debate such as the throne speech and budget debates as well as opposition days, means that a very strict timetable will have to be worked out for planning the business of the house.

Mr. Aiken: Would the minister permit a question? On the basis of the mathematics he has just given, if it is going to take a month for any bill to be passed by the house, how many bills are we going to get through in a session?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Perhaps this gives the best demonstration. As the hon. member may not be aware, under our rules this would not mean a month of actual sitting time of the house. In view of the two or three weeks in committee stage, of course it will not be necessary for a bill to be under full consideration in the house itself for a month. It is a fact that we do have the committee stage in our legislation which now provides the elasticity that was not available previously when bills had to pass through committee of the whole stage in the house.

In conclusion I wish to say that efforts were made in the committee to arrive at some solution which we felt would be fair to both sides, that would be fair to the government in attempting to put its programs through parliament and would be fair to the opposition in giving them the opportunity to criticize legislation. What have been arrived at are medium time targets to be set which, in the case

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

of important bills, are minimal. I think it is fair to point out that, as hon. members feel perhaps rightly, they should take every step possible to prevent these particular measures from being adopted by the house. That is their view in this debate and presumably they will also have the same conviction about measures which are not just related to procedures of the house, that is to say, major legislation such as with regard to taxation, Indian policy or other important questions.

But I should like to make clear to the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) that I do not think his party should be criticized for having felt on a matter of principle that they had to take a long time in debating the omnibus Criminal Code bill. What the house has to do is to make a provision that while hon. members may feel they have to take that time they can at least be relieved of that obligation by some kind of fair allocation of time order which will enable other measures to be dealt with.

I really do not expect hon. members to support this. On the other hand, I am sure they do not expect me to favour a system whereby a minority in this house controls the business of the house. However, I trust we will have a meaningful debate in this regard, and I hope that perhaps even at this late date we may reach a general agreement in the house as to some effective means of programming the business, bearing in mind that section 49 of the B.N.A. Act says that ultimately the decisions of the house are to be made by a majority of voices.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 40, to inform the house that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie)—Post Office Department—zoning of postal addresses in large centres; the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom)—Agriculture—possibility of aid to western farmers following meeting between premier and Prime Minister; the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt)—National Revenue—Ingersoll, Ont.—steps to restore customs services.