

Business of the House

long that parliament will be obliged, in following its natural sense of priorities, to turn to other pieces of legislation. Surely this is not the purpose of parliamentary debate.

Conservative party spokesmen complained they had not enough time to debate the bill on second reading. They do not suggest what is enough time. How much time do you need to show how you feel about the principle of the bill? When the government learns there is an indefinitely long line of members waiting, ready to speak on the bill and fill the time of the House, it is entitled to draw its own conclusions.

I remind the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that when the government recently resorted to Standing Order 75C, two members of his party spoke in support of the use of it. The hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) said on December 2 of last year—I am paraphrasing—that the opposition should be given a fair chance, but it is necessary for the government to govern. He said he would do the same if he were in the government's shoes. The hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltsman) said much the same. In other words, both hon. members agreed that Standing Order 75C is a legitimate device which the government may use at a certain point.

After the opposition has made its points and expressed its objections, one hopes it will allow the House to proceed with its business. We must change from being a debating society to being a legislative body and do what must be done with legislation. Having inquired with hon. members opposite, it appears to me that they do not intend to let this debate come to a natural end.

Infamy has been alleged; treachery has been alleged. It has been said that parliament is the servant of the government and not the servant of the people of Canada. Certainly, parliament should not be the servant of the government. But should it be the servant of the opposition? Shall members of the opposition determine when parliamentary debate shall end, when a principle shall be considered as established and when bills shall be proceeded with? The President of the Privy Council indicated that there is much other business on the order paper. He is right. And there is a lot of other business which should be on the order paper.

● (1610)

We should dispose of this legislation, we should pass it through our normal procedures and move on to deal with other important matters which affect the people of Canada. Parliament is the servant of the people and I would urge members of the opposition not to prolong this debate to the full two hours permitted, or to the additional five hours. Let us get the bill in committee and then proceed to other business in this Chamber.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I take part in this debate as one who did not speak during the discussion on the second reading of the bill. I may say I take strong issue with the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp), and with the parliamentary secretary who has just spoken. My position is certainly far removed from theirs.

It seems to me the government demonstrated a desire to downgrade parliament as an institution and to downgrade the right of each of us here to speak on behalf of our constituents. This is one of the issues which brought me into politics. When the government decided to bring forward this motion under Standing Order 75C it seemed to me it was not only missing the spirit of the rule but abusing it to a serious degree. Clearly the President of the Privy Council has the right, within the rules, to bring forward such a motion if no agreement can be reached with respect to the progress of legislation. In a technical sense he has acted in accordance with that Standing Order. But I submit that he, and the members who support him, miss the whole point of that rule.

The concept of closure was indeed established here by Sir Robert Borden, but hon. members should bear in mind that this was during the first world war at a time when an external threat was facing our country. Closure was not envisaged merely for the purpose of facilitating government business, as seems to be the case now. It was not used merely because the government was dissatisfied with the speed at which a particular piece of legislation was progressing. We have a duty and an obligation to speak on measures such as Bill C-68 when we feel it is in the interests of our constituents to do so.

The President of the Privy Council talks about 63 speeches having been made. Well, 63 speeches out of 264 is still a low percentage. What is going to happen when we have 400 members as a result of the redistribution proposals? I suppose the whole question of the rights and privileges of members will have to be redefined at that point, but I do not think it is incumbent upon the government to invoke closure under a provision of this sort whenever it feels a bill is not moving as quickly as it would like.

I have to agree with the parliamentary secretary to some extent. I found the attitude of the New Democratic Party toward this issue to be disappointing. I thought the NDP did a disservice by making it clear that it was their intention to filibuster the bill, appearing in the Chamber with large filibuster books, and so on. This, naturally, would egg on the government and play into its hands. I do not think the NDP did any good by showing such a flippant attitude toward the legislation, by having those books displayed in the House of Commons indicating they intended to participate in a filibuster.

The motion put before us by the President of the Privy Council is becoming an increasingly common procedure. It is becoming a mark of Liberal administration. I recall my first involvement in politics when I was a university student; it was brought about by the arrogance of the government in imposing closure at the time of the pipe line debate. I have just finished reading a book written by a former member for Bonavista-Twillingate, Mr. Pickersgill, in which he indicated that when he and his cabinet colleagues moved closure at the time of the pipe line debate in 1956 they worried and fretted for a long time because they did not want the Liberal party to be identified with the imposition of closure.

What do we find today? The only reason the minister gives us for his action is that the bill is not progressing as quickly as the government would like. If the government is