

Government Orders

We are proceeding with second reading at this time in order to get it to committee. It is a very substantial bill. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for International Trade and my parliamentary secretary each put a motion to the House asking that the bill be referred, prior to second reading, to a committee so it could be examined. It was turned down on both occasions by the New Democratic Party on the floor of this House.

The apparent anxiousness of the New Democratic Party members to discuss this bill is a little bit inconsistent in their argument because when we provided an opportunity they chose not to take it.

I have to repeat that the Standing Orders are there. They are being applied properly and in the proper tradition. The question is: How much debate is enough? I have never been able to get a response to that question when I put it to the opposition repeatedly over the last month.

• (1535)

I would remind the House that the mother of Parliaments, Westminster, was able to conclude a vote on second reading of the Maastricht Treaty legislation, surely very profound legislation, after just six hours; but apparently this House is incapable of dealing with something like NAFTA in anything less than an unlimited amount of time, which is really not very credible when we think about it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Rocheleau (Hull—Aylmer): Mr. Speaker, for us in the Bloc Québécois, it is not a matter of settling scores with the Official Opposition or the NDP, but we were not consulted by the government. Even if we agree with the principle of free trade with the United States and Mexico, we think that we must have the time required to debate the issue in this House.

I find this motion premature and I strongly endorse what my colleague from the New Democratic Party said to the effect that the Speaker should consider the great significance of this bill and give this House the time it needs to deal with it.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the government House leader and know from whence he came. He and I shared the same

side of the aisle in terms of Parliament, decorum, bills, debate and some of the figures he read out here about closure being used and/or allocation of time in a former government. I fully believe governments have the right to allocation of time, and certainly this government has been doing very well at exercising that right.

With this putative order that is before the House, the member for Winnipeg Transcona has so ably raised points in objecting to having it even put. As the member for Hull—Aylmer points out, the interpretation of that order in something so fundamental will actually limit the possibility of members or even registered parties being able to participate. It will certainly limit any independent member or any member of the Bloc Québécois in speaking because of the way the House provides and/or rotates the time for speaking. That is not really my point.

This is a fundamental bill, and having listened to the government House leader talk about this issue being debated in the country, it shows the reflection he has about the House.

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. I think I have given a lot of latitude. I said I was going to hear this point. I do not think we need to get personal about it.

I have to make this decision on what the procedural law is and that is where I need assistance.

Mr. Nowlan: Mr. Speaker, I will be very short. The member for Winnipeg Transcona quoted some reasoning to you that was very interesting and very just on earlier decisions. He quoted all the points. This is beyond the letter of the law or beyond the technicalities of the rule for allocation. There is the letter of the law, the rule of law, and the intent.

Mr. Speaker, you are a member of this House of Commons and know the reason for allocation of time. The debate started on Thursday and you were not in the chair, Mr. Speaker, but your deputy was so you may not recollect what happened. The debate started at 10.50 Thursday morning. It then became embroiled in very controversial discussions and statements so there was no debate.

It finally got back on the rail and after hearing only three speakers, the spokespeople for the three parties, the House rose at four minutes after one o'clock. The debate lasted two hours and 14 minutes. There is not a member on the government side who ever sat in opposition who feels comfortable with a government leader