

Proposal for Time Allocation

That is the closure rule.

—Mr. Diefenbaker must explain why he gave repeal of that rule such low priority that, even with a large majority—

The largest majority in our history, Mr. Speaker.

—and, as it turned out, with the assent of the Liberals—

Because we asked him to do this.

—he failed in six years to remove it.

Mr. Diefenbaker: But we never imposed it at any time.

Mr. Pearson: It was mentioned during the campaign, and in the first speech from the throne of my right hon. friend's government there was included the sentence: "We will abolish closure". That was in 1957.

Mr. Hellyer: A broken promise.

Mr. Pearson: It was never used and it was never abolished, and it is part of our procedure now.

Closure, of course, can be a very arbitrary action. The right hon. gentleman referred this afternoon to Sir Winston Churchill in terms of admiration and respect which we all feel for a great democrat and lover of parliament. But Sir Winston Churchill did not hesitate in government to use closure when he felt it was necessary to do so.

Mr. Diefenbaker: With the consent of the Speaker.

Mr. Pearson: But in order to avoid closure, Mr. Speaker, we have by agreement—and this is part of the rules and procedures of this house—worked out a system of time allocation for legislative and other proposals that come before this house. We hope that agreement on allocation of time can be reached voluntarily. However, if it cannot be reached voluntarily it can then be made the subject of a motion put to the house by the government of the day for its acceptance or its rejection. Is there any fairer way than that to bring debate to an end when the time has come for a decision to be made after due debate? That is what we are asking to do today, Mr. Speaker.

I want to discuss this procedure because I think this is the first time in our parliamentary history that any government has asked parliament to allocate time for a piece of legislation. We are here to consider this procedure, and I think we must consider it in light of the present parliamentary situation

[Mr. Pearson.]

and the debate that has taken place on this bill. We must consider whether there has been time for adequate consideration and discussion in the light of the present situation of parliament, in the light of the important developments in our country which require parliamentary intervention and action, and in the light of the necessity for getting on with the business of parliament and the business of the House of Commons that requires us to take action in regard to these important matters.

● (4:10 p.m.)

I shall examine this resolution in the terms and context of our parliamentary program and the functioning of parliament under the present rules and in existing political circumstances. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this is the context in which we should be discussing this matter and not in the context chosen for the most part by my right hon. friend, which would be more appropriate for the debate on the defence bill, a debate that has been going on for days and days and days. I shall ask the house, Mr. Speaker, to look at the basic situation we face today in the light of parliamentary and legislative action. When that is done I suggest that it will not be difficult to justify in the minds of the majority of this house and in the minds of the majority of people in this country that the time has come to bring this debate, important as it has been, to a conclusion so that we may get on with other important pieces of legislation.

Our country is developing. It is changing at a pace and in a way that is unprecedented in our history. New problems are constantly emerging because of these changes. Because of increased organization, because of the need of people to shift from areas of less than full employment to areas of labour shortage and because with our complex industrial economy it is essential to make adjustments constantly to ensure the continuance of the high rate of growth in this country, increasing prosperity and the high standard of living, we must adopt our living to new conditions.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Half a million unemployed.

Mr. Pearson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are half a million unemployed and that is a deplorable situation, but only half as deplorable as when there were a million unemployed under my right hon. friend. Half a million is bad but one million is worse. We want the kind of legislative changes put into effect