

Business of the House

this measure has been used four times. Is this the procedure we can now expect to be used? Are we to have a few hours' debate on important matters and then be gagged in the opposition? The Minister of Justice said the committee is the place to study this bill, rather than here in the House. If we carry that argument to its logical conclusion, it means that we will just have second reading with a bill referred to the committee, and that is all. That is nonsense.

Mr. Sharp: We said ten days' debate, first.

Mr. Woolliams: I suggest that if this is the way we are going to carry on in this place, parliament will not last. God help Canada, God help the democratic process, and God help Canadians. How long can this country withstand this government that was elected on a program totally different to that which it is trying to implement now? This is the same government which is preaching and implementing an easing of the laws which, either intentionally or unintentionally, is making it easier for the criminal element to operate against law-abiding citizens. The government now comes forward with a peace and security package to cover its mistakes. This is a legal poultice to cover up the next bill, C-84, about which the government is frightened of public opinion.

I hope the Minister of Justice's promises about amendments to be made to the bill and briefs that will be received from a wide section of the country are not idle promises. The Minister of Justice may feel that we should be allowed to call more witnesses and hear more briefs, but I am always afraid of another guillotine that can be used outside this chamber. That guillotine is the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who will tell the Minister of Justice how many briefs and how many witnesses can be heard. He is the man behind the scene. This is the Prime Minister's baby, and the mover of this motion is merely his puppet.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Woolliams: The government House leader dances to the tune of the Prime Minister. Because of this action on the part of the government, when this bill does get to the committee, which has always worked well together, instead of there being that kind of fellowship and co-operation we will have nothing but tension.

Mr. Lang: Oh, surely!

Mr. Woolliams: The minister says "Oh, shoot". He might want to change that word, because I could use it in reply.

Mr. Lang: I said, "Oh, surely"—you are not being serious.

Mr. Woolliams: I am being very serious. I think this is a very serious matter. The hon. member for Saskatoon-Humboldt (Mr. Lang) may think this is a great joke because the guillotine is part of his way of life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the parliamentary secretary rising on a point of order?

Mr. Blais: No, Mr. Speaker; I wish to participate in the debate.

[Mr. Woolliams.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The parliamentary secretary did not rise in time, and I recognize the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltsman).

● (1640)

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, on one occasion, when discussing the relative merits of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) as against the merits of the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), someone asked me who I would hire as my lawyer if I had to go to court. My reply, of course, was obvious: I said that it depended upon whether I was innocent, or guilty. If I was guilty, I would obviously take the Minister of Justice, because that had been his role for a long time. I remember the minister when he was a bright, curly-headed backbencher. His job in those days was to take the bad case of the government and to defend it. That is how he got to be Minister of Justice. He did such a fine job of defending bad cases that they made him minister—and he is still doing the same thing. So everything changes, and nothing changes.

This is one of the things that I do not think the Liberals will ever learn, namely, that it is important to have an opposition in the House of Commons. If the Liberal party had its way, there would be just the Liberal party in the House.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Saltsman: I hear "Hear, hear!" They admit to it openly. When they say that, after all, they are entitled to speak and they rise and say they are entitled to equal time with the opposition, do you feel like asking them, "What are you guys supposed to be doing in caucus? This is not the Liberal caucus, this is the House of Commons." I presume that they have voices in their own caucus, and I presume someone pays attention to them in their caucus. But perhaps they do not; perhaps they sit there like a bunch of sheep in caucus and no one pays any attention, so they impose closure so that someone notices they are alive. They do not understand the most elementary fact about parliamentary debate and the opposition.

What is the point of this debate? This is an important decision that parliament is being asked to make. It is a decision that must be aired, a decision that needs time to gel. They say, "Take it to committee and examine it point by point." It is valuable, and no one disagrees that it will go to committee at some point; but public opinion is formed in this House of Commons and it needs time to form. That is the point of the debate, and that is the one thing the Liberals do not seem to want any part of. They can take the best case in the world and, by some incredible piece of genius, turn it to mud. Many of us on this side of the House recognize the importance of this legislation and, in fact, have spent a good part of our time going around the country and defending it. We have tried to reassure people that the government does not mean to be arbitrary, that it does not mean to behave badly to the collectors of guns or the legitimate hunters in this country.

What is the government trying to do? It is trying destroy a good case. It is going out of its way to take a good case and wreck it so that nobody can defend it. This is really what the implication is. If we look at the legislation, we find sections in it that have an arbitrary ring. One of the