

Time Allocation

[English]

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I listened with some interest to what the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean (Mr. Gimaiël) had to say. One of his comments concerned the urgent need that he felt to be out of here and that the opposition parties were holding up the recess of the House of Commons. He said that he wanted to get back to his constituency. I can understand that desire on his part. I know that a lot of members would like to be working in their own constituencies. But I want to tell the hon. member that the opposition parties are not holding up the recess of the House. The people holding up the recess of the House, as far as I, as the member for Kingston and the Islands, am concerned, are the government members who will not bring in Bill C-53, the amendments to the Criminal Code, which will allow us to change the crime of rape to a series of sexual assault charges. As long as that bill is not brought into the House I am not going home, and I want him to know that. That bill has to come before the House before we recess for the summer.

I am very interested in the fact that the government feels it necessary at this point to introduce a motion under Standing Order 75C on Bill C-124. This is a bill which the government said is key to its economic recovery plan and is one of the major pieces of legislation introduced in this session. What I find very unusual about the government's use of closure is that it always feels it is necessary to use it on the major pieces of legislation it brings into the House, the things that it considers to be most important and which should justify the greatest examination by members on all sides and members of the committee. Before that can take place the government brings in closure and cuts off debate. It moved closure on the Constitution bill before it was even under way. Before the country knew what was happening with regard to the major changes to the Constitution, the government introduced closure. And it has done so again.

What this signifies to me is that when it comes to major pieces of legislation that the government wants to introduce, it immediately feels insecure. The only thing it feels secure about is a motion under Standing Order 75C. It can hide behind closure instead of facing the legitimate questions that should be asked by its own party, by members of the opposition and by the Canadian public. That is the situation with this bill.

This bill requires a great deal of examination, Mr. Speaker. We have given it a fair amount of examination in committee but by no means have all the questions been answered. I very much regret the decision of the government to cut off debate before it has made its position clear with regard to its intentions on all aspects of the bill.

It seems that at every step of this bill the government has introduced new and ill-conceived amendments that have not been properly thought through. That was very evident in the House today when questions were put to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) about the 6 and 5 per cent society that he predicts, of which he says this bill is the cornerstone. What happened? He said, "Why are you asking me those questions? They concern somebody else. I should not

have to answer them." Surely if he is co-ordinating a program for the government he ought to be able to answer legitimate questions about to whom these 6-5 measures will apply and how far they will go. They have not been answered. That is why extra debating time is necessary.

• (1610)

I mentioned that he brings in ill-conceived amendments. Nothing is more ill conceived, as I pointed out to the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) the other day, than Motion No. 3 standing in his own name. This is the amendment which changes the time period in which the restraint measures will apply to staff of Members of Parliament and members of the Senate. To that effect, I moved a motion today which I sincerely hope the President of the Treasury Board will consider. I asked that the government amend immediately Bill C-124 so that its provisions take effect for the staff of MPs and senators on the expiry of their present salary arrangements, as they will for all other employees in the public service, and that staff of MPs and senators not be singled out for punitive action by this government.

I listened to the President of the Treasury Board speak to that item when he took part in this closure debate. I made a note of some of the words he used when he spoke. He said "We have to take that step." In other words, to take the punitive action it has against the staff of Members of Parliament and senators in order to counter the unfortunate impression the government has received about the country with regard to another group of employees known as exempt ministerial staff. If the President of the Treasury Board were honest in his presentation, he would have stood in his place and said that exempt staff for ministers, on average, are paid much, much higher salaries than are staff of Members of Parliament and senators, who are in categories ranging from \$24,000 a year down. Some of them earn as little as \$14,000. The majority of them are women, many of whom, if the minister would take the time to inquire around this building, are single parents supporting families and who really should not be put in a situation where they are singled out for punitive action.

I am sure that if the minister had asked a number of Members of Parliament whether we would have been willing to take a further cut so staff in our offices did not have to take a cut, he would have got agreement. I am sure he would have found that there were members willing to make that sacrifice so that the people unable to bear that kind of burden would not have had to. I really regret, as I told the President of the Treasury Board the other day, the fact that he has done this.

However, I want to tell the minister that I said some things in anger the other day about which I feel badly. I know now that the idea for this measure did not come from him. I know now that it came from the office of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), that it originated from a reaction of spite in the Prime Minister's office. Consequently, I regret some of the things I said to the minister the other day even though he is the