

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

himself more easily and personally with regard to the decisions the government should reach. Indeed, parliament is the national forum of public opinion and if debates must be limited to a bare minimum on important legislation, we may reach a point where parliament will become again what it was formerly, that is a joke, from several points of view.

We accept most of the changes put forward today because they have been discussed by the majority of the house leaders. We accept, for instance, the one concerning the distribution of the time of the house. In fact, we must admit, as the chairman of the committee on procedure said this afternoon, that we only have at our disposal about 165 sitting days a year, including 8 for the address in reply to the speech from the throne, 6 for the budget, 28 for estimates and about 123 for legislation in general.

So the time of the house must be allotted; it was the primary objective of the committee on procedure. For that, we must shorten certain debates so as to divide the session into quarters, ending respectively on December 10, March 10 and June 30. We approve these changes, because they provide for an intelligent and logical allotment of time. They will enable parliament to know where it stands, but procedure will have to undergo other changes.

We are also in favour of eliminating the duplication of debates, that is for instance, to hear three speeches on the same subject, simply because our procedure authorizes it. In the past, it was possible to make a speech at the resolution stage, another on the motion for second reading and a third on the motion for third reading, which was a useless repetition of debates. We admit today that we have agreed to these proposals for the elimination of these repetitions so that the house would have more time for the study of legislation.

It is not our intention to review all the items in the report which was tabled by the chairman of the committee this afternoon. We have discussed this report together and we have accepted it. However, we were most surprised by the changes which had been kept until the end and which we do not accept, namely standing order 16A where, on the one hand, the co-operation of house leaders is requested and, on the other hand, their agreement is compulsory, otherwise the decision of the government will be forced upon them and the quorum required to enforce that decision is "me, myself and I." It is said that this committee will consist of

[Mr. Rondeau.]

three members when, in fact, it will always be the same person.

Mr. Speaker, such practice singularly exceeds the legislative power of a member of the house who, in this instance, could decide the time allotted for the consideration of such and such legislation. If the time to be allotted for the study of a bill is set by one man only, the house leader could shout "closure", just as General de Gaulle could have shouted: Long live free Canada, and the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau): Long live a just society. Yet, I could say that this is a just society only for fun, because the government house leader, under standing order 16A could very well convene us on Mondays and Wednesdays, at the time of his choice, in the way he chooses, since this is not mentioned.

The practice always observed in the past amongst house leaders, the discussion and the agreement, are scorned. From here on, no discussion; one man will decide and the government will vote.

In my opinion, this procedure is not only undemocratic but also arrogant. As pointed out by the honorable member for Winnipeg North Centre what can the backbenchers do in this house with such a procedure? If one day, the house leader decides that one hour will be allocated for a debate on some legislation, that the spokesman of the government will be allotted 30 minutes and a spokesman of the opposition 30 additional minutes, the hour will be over. No representative of the New Democratic party nor of the Ralliement Cr ditiste will have the opportunity to speak on that legislation, while in Great Britain, they have reached a point where some members even vote against their own leader.

In Canada at the present time, under standing order 16A, the opposition is threatened with being deprived of its freedom of speech and with being unable to do anything in parliament, which amounts to this: You will accept, otherwise we will show the mailed fist. We will therefore have to defer to the will of just one man.

I hope the government will revise its decision, because once standing order 16A is passed, it will become a weapon in its hands, the first victim of which will be, I am sure, democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that the Prime Minister, who advocated parliamentary reform, should see to it that standing order 16A disappears, so that in the future parliament can give a better image of itself and, above all, while saving face, save democracy also.