

Proposal for Time Allocation

over the ground, under and over the sea, and on into outer space, and with the life of man from cradle to grave.

The amount of business we have to cope with emphasizes the problem of time. That obviously is a prelude to suggesting we have to find ways of planning the use of our time. We have to find ways of regulating the amount of talking we do on the various issues that are before us. That of course immediately leads one to suggest that we must not forget the purposes of parliament.

I am reminded that the purposes of parliament, in the main, are twofold. There are a lot of incidental ones that we seem to produce as we go along, but there are two main ones. On the one hand it is our function to discuss the proposals that the government of the day places before the house, and a parliament that does not have free speech, a parliament that does not have the right to discuss those proposals as adequately and as sufficiently as necessary, is no parliament at all. But the other function of parliament is to make decisions, to decide whether or not the proposals placed before it by the government should be put into effect, and I say with equal vigour that a parliament that is denied the opportunity to make decisions on proposals that are placed before it is likewise no parliament at all.

I urge therefore that we should keep these things in balance. As a matter of fact, that is what the development of rules and procedures is all about. That is our constant struggle, to try to find the kind of rules that will achieve a balance between the right of free speech and the right of parliament to make decisions. The whole idea that in order to do this we have to do something about speaking time, whether it is the speaking time of an individual member or whether it is the time that the House of Commons spends on a motion or on an issue is, of course, not new.

We already have many time limits built into our rules, which we have come to accept without any question. For example, we have a 40 minute rule on speeches made while Your Honour is in the chair. When that 40 minutes is up the member speaking is through. Sometimes by unanimous consent he is allowed to go on, but the rule says that the member has had his say. There is no denial of free speech in that. The member must sit down so that another member can speak, and that applies whether it is the 40 minute rule when the Speaker is in the chair, or whether

[Mr. Knowles.]

it is the 30 minute rule in committee of the whole.

We have accepted the proposition that the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne should be limited to eight days. No one shouts closure when the eighth day comes and Your Honour announces from the chair that the vote must be taken. No one says this is a curtailment of free speech. The same thing applies with respect to the Budget debate which is limited to six days. The same thing applies with respect to supply motions which are limited to two days. The fact is that freedom of speech does not mean licence to talk forever. It means the opportunity for some people to express their views, with due opportunity for others to speak, and this can be worked out only by rules and regulations that are fair to all concerned.

Therefore I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we are being quite consistent with the practices we have already established when we face the fact, as I hope parliament is doing, that we are going to have to accept not only limitations on individual speeches, not only limitations on perfunctory debates such as the address in reply, and the debate when Mr. Speaker is in the chair on the budget, but we are going to have to accept time limits on debates, on measures and bills that are brought before us.

I want to say again, as my leader said this afternoon, that doing this to me is not nearly as much a form of closure as it is for debate to be unlimited. I believe the most effective form of closure on other subjects is for the house to go on forever on one subject. I think one of the tragedies of the 1964-65 lengthy debate on the flag issue was that we spent so much time on it that we were not able to get at some other measures. I think if we had not spent all the time on the flag issue we might have got medicare in 1964. Someone said to me the other day, when I said this in another context, that there would not have been any more chance of getting medicare then than now, since it has been put back until July, 1968, in any event. In reply I would remind the house that in 1964 we did not have the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp), and if we had had time to get at the medicare bill then we might have had it in effect a couple of years ago.

Mr. Churchill: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Knowles: Certainly.