

Debating Time Allotment

standing committee on procedure and organization has not been adopted by parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the arrogance of the President of the Privy Council is obvious. I understand that with a majority government it is possible to disregard the actions, decisions or recommendations of any committee, on the ground that the majority rules. However, if that is democracy, it is rather shaky and the President of the Privy Council has the duty to change his attitude with regard to the rights of hon. members who sit on the committee on procedure and organization.

● (9:10 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, I was a member of the committee on procedure some years back and I have retained a cursory interest in this subject since then. As a result, I feel impelled to make a few comments on three points of argument which have been presented to us this evening from the government side. The first two points were advanced by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) and no doubt he intended that we should take them seriously, though it was difficult to do so. The third argument was advanced by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald).

The Minister of Agriculture contended that the government has the right to move government orders. This is a ridiculous red herring to bring into the debate on which we are now engaged, a debate which is being conducted in an extremely tense atmosphere. The right to which he refers is not involved at all. What is involved is whether the government is entitled to make its own substitute for something parliament has ordered somebody else to do.

On September 28 of last year this house ordered a special committee to look into certain questions of procedure, among other things, the allocation of time for debate, and to bring its views before us. The committee has now carried out this work. Whether we agree with its suggestions is not germane to the debate. The question is whether the government has the right to disassociate itself from recommendations which the committee thought were acceptable, and bring something like this before us.

The second argument advanced by the Minister of Agriculture was that the government must direct the manner in which the house runs its business. I say an emphatic no to this proposition, and I believe any member of the opposition would do the same. Indeed,

[Mr. Caouette.]

I believe many hon. members opposite would share my attitude, though they have to express themselves secretly; they cannot present their true Liberal views openly on this particular point. I say it is not the business of the government to tell us how we are to run our own affairs. It is the business of each and every one of us.

We succeed best in this chamber when there is a consensus, and we succeed least when our course of action is dictated to us. I reject the reasoning of the Minister of Agriculture in this connection. The house must itself decide how to run its business. If it is not allowed to do so, there can only be trouble.

Finally, there is the argument put forward by the President of the Privy Council. He told us the Liberal members of the committee agreed that the government motion was the better one. What kind of an argument is that? As if these people, who had worked hard and long in the committee, would suddenly say: Well, after all, father knows best.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McCleave: In the days ahead, when a large issue involving the freedom of parliament is concerned, or the right of parliamentary control of the executive—kings have lost their heads because they would not listen—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. McCleave: I say that in the days ahead, if the procedure envisaged in this motion is adopted and put into operation, the people of this country can expect no hope when they look to any member on the government side of the house.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder whether hon. members do not feel they have used all the arguments which could be advanced. Hon. members must recognize that discussion on a point of order is not for the pleasure of arguing the procedure but for the specific purpose of advising the Chair. I have a definite impression that all possible arguments on this point have been advanced, although I would not want to prevent hon. members from putting any further arguments which they might feel have not already been submitted. If the hon. member for Annapolis Valley (Mr. Nowlan) thinks he qualifies in this regard, I shall be pleased to call him and thank him for his assistance.

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): I always defer to your good judgment and wisdom, Mr. Speaker. I enter this debate not as