

could take place on Wednesday afternoon. However, as Thursday is an opposition day, and if today cannot be considered the first day, the third day would be Friday and the vote would have to be taken on Friday afternoon. If hon. members would like to consider today as the first day, and we get through this motion quickly, we could dispose of the vote on Wednesday as the last item of government business.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am really asking for a ruling from the Chair as to what the motion means.

Mr. Speaker: I have not, of course, been met with any argument on the precedents as to what is meant. It is difficult for the Chair to determine what a motion means, when the motion has not been carried. But the motion refers to a number of additional days; therefore, at the time the motion is carried it would speak of additional days from that moment.

It is also clear—and the point has been argued—in all our precedents that the day on which a decision is taken is not one of those days. The question is not before me as an argued point, but decisions of the past are quite clear that decisions of the House take effect the moment they are taken. Obviously, if that is at nine o'clock tonight, five o'clock this afternoon, or even now, the precedents say that since the motion says "sitting days", it does not mean today.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I would be agreeable to some alternative. We could have those votes on Wednesday, if we consider today the first day. I understand that there are problems for many hon. members on Friday afternoons. I would agree to postponing the votes and making them the first item on Monday after the question period. At that time we would begin the third reading stage of this bill. It has been the first priority of the government since the end of the throne speech debate more than a month ago. We want to finish it as quickly as possible. If there is no accommodation with regard to what the motion means, the votes would be taken as the last item of business on Friday afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems that hon. members are trying to carry on negotiations, albeit in good faith, on the floor of the House. I remind hon. members that we are talking about the committee stage of this bill, and I do not think it is necessary to envisage that on Friday afternoon the votes would take place because that is simply the automatic conclusion, by virtue of this order, of the committee stage of the bill when the committee would deal with the questions necessary to stop at that time, rise and report the bill to the House. That does not, of itself or in its own terms, constitute a recorded division. Therefore, the sensible thing must be to let some time go by in an attempt to negotiate the easiest way around this question between now and either late Wednesday or Friday, depending on what time is available. I think I have made clear what the decision on the precedents would be if the point were argued.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to speak at length about this motion. During consideration of Bill C-11, on

Allotment of Time for Bill C-11

November 22, 1977, the Minister of State (Multiculturalism) (Mr. Cafik) tabled a motion in my name regarding the need for the government to have an order passed by the House to shorten the debate.

I wish to say, Mr. Speaker, that Bill C-11 follows the budget put forward by my predecessor, the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald). The bill was tabled last spring. Consequently, there was a six day debate on these budgetary measures. In addition, when the House was reconvened last fall, the opposition had clearly indicated to the government that they would use the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne as a means to discuss our economic policy. All matters which have been discussed in the House as well as the motion put forward by opposition parties during the debate that followed the message delivered by Her Majesty the Queen and lasted eight days dealt with the economic situation. Later on, we did have a ten day debate on second reading of this same bill. At that time, we were obliged to impose closure and restrict the duration of the debate in order to progress. We have already had four days of consideration in committee and yet, Mr. Speaker, we have done virtually no progress on a bill which contains 120 clauses. We have dealt with five of them after four days of discussion. Obviously, opposition members do not intend to pass these measures which are extremely important to the economy of this country.

The budget speech made by the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald), who was then finance minister, provided for substantial incentives to the private sector, to encourage it to make new investments to promote a more adequate growth of our economy.

As I have noted in my many conversations with Canadian businessmen and in a great number of newspaper articles, businessmen have always said they did not believe we were going to approve the legislation introduced by my predecessor, the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald), and even though I have reassured them several times about this, many believe that we shall change our mind and they are waiting for this legislation to be passed before making any decision. I understand that our system is different from the American system, but under the American system, the president introduces a budget which is then completely changed by the House of Representatives or the Senate. In Canada, when the government introduces a budget, the House must dispose of it, otherwise there are elections, but this is not always understood.

I suggest today that we spend three full sitting days to finish the debate in the committee of the whole. Then we should have one or two days for the third reading stage, and if we compare this with other debates, and I would refer to the bill introduced by my predecessor in 1976, Bill C-22, we see that the House took 11 days to study this bill, plus the six days of the budget debate, which gave a total of 17 days.

To this day, we have spent six days debating the budget in the spring. During the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, we spent in fact eight days studying economic problems. We have now been studying this bill for 14 days, we expect to study it in committee of the whole for