

debate in this House on NAFTA except on opposition days when we have had the odd day.

There has not been a debate on this bill before in this House as there was with the previous bill. While we objected strenuously to the use of closure in 1988, the argument was not advanced that it was improper for the government to make use of it at that time in part because the government said there had been extensive previous debate. That is true.

This time there has not been. There has been one morning of debate on this bill and not even a full morning.

• (1530)

Now we have the government coming before the House again with time allocation. We have become accustomed to this abuse because it has been used repeatedly. It was used yesterday, it was used today, and it will be used tomorrow. It is constantly being used after very short debate. The government has frequently called a bill on a Friday morning for an hour and then applied time allocation so there is one more day of debate, in other words one day plus one day.

The hon. member scoffs. That is true. He can look at the record. He can look at last Friday and see what happened then.

I plead, as the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona has, to look at the question of fairness in this case and whether the government majority is not abusing its position by using time allocation day after day, after very short debate on major bills of considerable public importance and debate.

Surely there should be an opportunity for this House to have a reasonable discussion on the principles of the NAFTA deal before this bill is approved. Yet we are being denied that opportunity by this motion. We are being limited to one morning plus one Wednesday afternoon. That is the effect of this motion.

I submit that is an abuse of the rules of the House. The government House leader should be hiding his head in shame at this abuse. I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to use your power to rule this motion out of order today

without prejudice to the government's right to bring the motion in at a subsequent time.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, in terms of the question of order, of course it should be pointed out that attempts were made with both opposition parties to seek agreement under Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) for some appropriate time of debate and it was denied on both counts.

Second, the requirement of Standing Order 78(3) in terms of having the bill currently under consideration was done. Notice was given the day before as required under Standing Order 78(3). No less than one further day for completion was the requirement of Standing Order 78(3) and that is part of the motion. All of the requirements of our Standing Orders and in fact of this motion have been followed very clearly. It is very clear the motion is in order and should be proceeded with.

I want to comment on some accusations that have been made. For example, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands just talked about his experience since being here and what it has shown him about time allocation and so on. I thought he would be interested to know that from 1988 to 1992 time allocation was used on 13 bills; from 1984 to 1988 it was used on 16 bills; and from 1980 to 1984, when there was a Liberal government before his time, it was used on 18 bills. Therefore any accusation of escalation is in fact fallacious in terms of the record.

In terms of whether there has been adequate debate on this particular subject, the subcommittee of external affairs and international trade has been considering the NAFTA treaty since last November. It has toured the country and heard from some 119 different witnesses. The witnesses who were there did not laugh. It has been the subject matter of Question Period almost every day for months and months.

We commenced second reading debate. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, who was the spokesman, under the rules provided for 20 minutes and 10 minutes. The House unanimously agreed to extend that to 40 minutes. On many occasions I offered to sit through the noon hour or the evening to discuss it but it was turned down on every occasion.