

Motion for Concurrence in Report

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Debate is the means whereby we bring into focus the problems, opinions and thoughts of the people of Canada whom we represent. Yes, I agree with the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton—perhaps he was quoting me—that the most insidious form of closure is unlimited time spent on one or two measures so that there is no time left to deal with other matters. I am very clear in my mind where I stand. We must have reforms that cope with the problem of time. But you do not cope with the problem of time in a democratic state by giving all the power over parliament to a dictator—which is what the new rule 16-A would do.

The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton referred to this report as the report of our committee. He was correct in saying once or twice that certain things were passed by the majority. That is true. Indeed, when it came to proposed standing order 16-A, all the Liberals voted for it and all the members from all opposition parties voted against it. We were not only against it in committee; we are against it here.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Although I am opposed to proposed standing order 16-A I think it is only fair to the house and, I think, fair to myself that I take a few minutes to express my approval of most of what is in the fourth report and practically all that is in the fifth report that we shall be dealing with later. Many of the items in those reports are items we have been proposing for a number of years. I like what we have done. For example, we have decided to cut out what some new members in particular have felt to be a ridiculous duplication of debate. We have done that by saying that it is not necessary to debate money bills at the resolution stage, at the second reading stage, in committee of the whole and at the third reading stage. We decided to cut out one of the stages of debate, namely the resolution stage, and we recommended that in our report. We have also taken the view that it is hardly a good use of our time to have a thorough debate on a bill in a standing committee so far as its clauses are concerned, only to have that debate all over again on the floor of the house. We decided that we should have one or the other but not both debates. We made a similar decision with respect to the budget. We noted that the budget went through several stages. There is the six day debate with

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Speaker in the chair, debate on the resolutions, debate on second reading, debate in committee of the whole and so on. We decided to cut out the stage of debate on the resolutions.

These things, Mr. Speaker, I regard not as something we have consented to begrudgingly but as improvements that are long overdue. We are pleased to support them. But I draw attention to the fact that all these items are means by which we have tried to cope with the problem of time. We have tried to contract the time to be used on certain stages so that we can have more time for more pieces of legislation.

We have done some other things, too. We met requests put to us by the government, and I have no hesitation in saying that we agreed to those requests. For example, hon. members who have been here for a while will recall that there have been times when the government wanted to deal with urgent matters but was not able to bring them before parliament because of the requirement that 48 hours notice must be given, and so on. There have been occasions when the whole house has been prepared to deal with something but one hon. member—let us think of one who is not here any more; he used to sit across the way—said, no. As a result, parliament was frustrated. We have therefore provided for rules which enable notice to be given of urgent legislation during the period of prorogation or during the period between a general election and the first meeting of parliament. We have also made a provision under which a government can ask for an extension of time through the supper hour or at the end of the day. It is true we have surrounded this with certain precautions, we have made it possible for ten members to prevent this happening and in this way to prevent abuses. Generally speaking, however, the whole tenor of our recommendations has been to try to eliminate duplication of debate and to facilitate the possibility of the nation's business getting before parliament and being dealt with.

● (5:40 p.m.)

I think it is true to say that these general recommendations meet with the approval of all of us. The new members who, after coming here, felt we were wasting a certain amount of time are delighted with them, and I believe the old members feel the same way about them. I also approve of the trial we propose to make of the new arrangements concerning the business of supply. If there is