

Proposal for Time Allocation

on behalf of his party that in the new session, that is in the fall, the stages up to the committee stage of the bill would be dealt with without debate or vote.

These proposals were rejected for the following reasons. They would, in effect, amount to a complete stopping of the bill at this time. This would leave the Department of National Defence and the armed forces in a position of uncertainty.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McIlraith: After careful consideration and examination it was felt this would lead to a material deterioration of morale in the department and armed forces.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McIlraith: It would mean also there would be no authority in the department to continue any steps forward in connection with this subject until the bill was passed. It would, in effect, be similar to the six months' hoist, because it would end the bill as far as this session was concerned though giving us the right, of course, to bring it forward in the new session of parliament and make progress next fall. This seemed to me and to others to be a wholly unrealistic approach to this question, although, as I have said, it did get very thorough consideration, notwithstanding interjections by some of the backbenchers opposite.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Are hon. members rising to ask further questions? We should determine in the first instance whether the minister has completed his remarks or whether he wishes to reply to further questions at this time.

Mr. Webb: A point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Hastings-Frontenac, do I gather that the minister is relinquishing the floor to the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. McIlraith: No, I have indicated that I would accept a question from the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich.

Mr. Speaker: Before the question is asked I believe the hon. member for Hastings-Frontenac has a point of order to raise.

Mr. Webb: The minister was kind enough to say he would answer all questions.

Mr. McIlraith: I did not say that.

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. member rising to ask a question? The hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich has been recognized first for that purpose.

Mr. Chatterton: May I ask the leader of the house to tell us the reasons which prompted the government to set two days for the committee stage? If the purpose was to bring an end to the debate why was a period of two days chosen rather than five or six days, for instance?

Mr. McIlraith: I can answer that question very simply. Notice was given on Thursday, one week ago today, that this procedure would be used. After that notice had been given the discussion continued, and in those intervening days it became quite clear from the lack of progress that there would be no disposition to dispose of the various clauses within any given length of time. Moreover, I had borne in mind that the committee had already spent 13 days in clause by clause consideration of the bill. I had also borne in mind intimations that no allocation of time however long would be agreeable to the opposition. It had been made very clear that it did not matter what length of time was proposed, whether weeks or months; they would not agree.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Webb: Since the government is today introducing closure in connection with a bill which concerns Canada's future defence, I would ask the minister whether it is significant that today is also the anniversary of Hitler's birthday.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McIlraith: But for a reference which was made at the beginning of the hon. member's question I would not answer it. This is not a closure procedure. A closure procedure is an arbitrary procedure taken to shut off debate. This procedure is based on the premise that there is a responsibility upon the house to permit a decision to be taken. It is a method of trying to make those groups which, without responsibility, would seek to impose their will on parliament, to negotiate and try to come to an agreement or arrangement consistent with their responsibilities in parliament. And it provides, in the event of failure to bring this about, that after due notice the house itself shall pass on the matter. That is not closure. That is the antithesis of closure procedure.