

Motion for Concurrence in Report

Mr. Blair: Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my thanks to hon. members and I will try not to transgress too much.

An hon. Member: You did not allocate your own time too well, did you, Gordon?

Mr. Blair: I was dealing with standing order 26 and had made the point that a member would not be permitted a further argument in support of the statement submitted to Mr. Speaker. The Speaker would then give his decision but would not be required to give reasons for his decision unless he wished to do so.

Should the Speaker find that the matter raised was, in the terms of the new standing order, a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, on ordinary days debate would be fixed to start at 8 p.m. in the evening. I should think that there will be general agreement with this proposal, but there may be some doubts about the desirability of not requiring the Speaker to give reasons for his decision. It should be noted that in order to prevent their parallel standing orders from accumulating a burden of precedents that would restrict Mr. Speaker in his judgment, the British house specifically prohibits the Speaker from stating his reasons.

I think that this abbreviated description of the matters covered in this report will serve to indicate the scope of the work which the house assigned to the committee and the importance of the recommendations the committee has decided to make to the house.

At all times the aim of the committee was to enhance the importance and the effectiveness of parliament. Its aim was to give a greater opportunity for participation to individual private members of parliament on both sides of the house, to provide better scrutiny for bills and for estimates, to provide a basic timetable which would enable hon. members, both private and ministerial, to plan their days and years so they could meet necessary obligations here and in their constituencies, to place the government in a position where it could only reasonably bring before parliament a legislative program which it was capable of enacting, to give the government the assurance of knowing that at certain stated intervals decisions would be made for or against its requests for supply. The final and I think the most important purpose of these recommendations is to give the opposition in parliament an ample opportunity to bring on debate on the issues they deem

[Mr. Speaker.]

important to the nation. This they do not possess at the present time.

Therefore I have the honour of moving, seconded by the hon. member for Sudbury (Mr. Jerome), that the fourth report of the special committee on proceedings of the house, presented to the house on Friday, December 6, 1968, be concurred in.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by thanking the mover of the motion for the moderate manner of his presentation, and I trust he realizes now that there may be different standards of judgment as to what is a waste of time and as to how long a member should have the opportunity to speak in the house.

I was struck by the continual emphasis the hon. gentleman placed upon British tradition. I also admire the British tradition, but I thought that hon. members opposite as well as most Canadians were anxious to develop our own traditions in Canada suited to our own conditions. I was a little surprised to find that whenever my hon. friend found the going somewhat heavy he fell back upon the practice at Westminster and on British tradition.

This debate may be a long one. I hope it will not because I hope the government will see reason before we spend too much time in this process, but whether the debate be long or short I hope it will be restrained and reasonable in tone.

We on this side of the house in more than one party believe that a fundamental issue is at stake—perhaps the fundamental issue. I refer to the right of parliament to control itself and thereby to control the government. This question has arisen before and we know it is an issue over which passions can be aroused on both sides of the house. It is also, in the context of this country at this time, an issue which can become obscured and partisan and, indeed, the subject of passionate debate.

All hon. members know that legislatures do not today everywhere enjoy the high repute in which we would like to see legislatures held. There is now a popular impression in some quarters that legislatures are an obstacle to good government. That impression offers to those who genuinely seek reform the natural temptation to change more than is needed and a temptation to change the purpose of parliament in the name of improving its procedures. This impatience with legislature, therefore, requires special vigilance on the