

Procedure and Organization

Then there is the question of how long a witness is going to take. I can give many examples during the past winter of very erudite, very learned witnesses, where a 30-second question prompted a 19-minute answer. This meant that a member with a 20-minute allocation of time during a round of questions got in one question, or perhaps two, and the answers took up the balance of his time allocation. How is the house leader going to deal with that? I say that the house leaders, with respect to bills over which there is controversy and with respect to lengthy bills, have no business imposing a time limit in committee. They do not know, except within very wide parameters, how long it is going to take. During the past winter we did not have any allocation of time in committees, but no one can point a finger at even one bill that was held up in committee.

On top of that, is it the intention of the government house leader to say that a committee shall sit morning, afternoon and evening? He may think so, but what about the staff? I have seen such decisions made on the spur of the moment, decisions like, "Oh, let us sit tonight," but there was no thought of checking with the staff about it. And remember, Mr. Speaker, every committee, for example the finance committee, takes between 30 and 40 people to attend to its needs. These include translators, transcribers, the electronic equipment operators and all of the other people involved. As I say, it takes a staff of between 30 and 40. Are you going to tell them on just the spur of the moment, "We are going to sit in the evening", or make an offhand decision that results in evening sittings?

The next thing we are going to meet is that these very competent and willing staffs are going to take the whole business and say, "Here, you get on with it. We quit."

An hon. Member: They are now.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Even now when we are still sitting in committees some have been delayed. Why? Because several of the staff have had to be given holidays in order to work off the great accumulations of overtime they have had built up to their credit. Yet this is what this proposal would load on to them. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say enough in condemnation of 75B in so far as it deals with the committee system.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): In so far as 75c is concerned, as I said before it is nothing

but an assault on parliament, completely and utterly, by the executive, not by the government backbenchers because they are frightened, unwilling and ignorant victims of what they propose to support through the allocation of time. Parliament as such is being delivered, tied hand and foot, with a gag already half way over its mouth.

How do you expect you are going to get voluntary agreement when the government house leader sits with 75c as a club behind his back and says, "Gentlemen, can we agree on this particular bill? If not, you know I have got 75c here. My proposal is that we are going to take it two days at a time, and that is it." Is this how one gets general agreement?

We are going to work to rule in this house, if and when 75c comes in. You will see the house work to rule, and the Lord only knows how slow that is going to be.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Will there be accommodation? Will the house leaders and committee chairmen go to see ministers or opposite members to discuss these matters and say, "Well, bring on that particular bill tonight because we have agreed among ourselves that it will take an hour to get it through this particular stage." Nothing doing, Mr. Speaker. All that will be said to the government will be, "Go back to 75c and do your damndest because we will see you freeze in Hades before we agree voluntarily."

This house gets along and has got along well on good, personal relations. It has gotten on pretty well this year, better than I have seen it for some years. But this proposed rule having been brought in by the government we saw an incident yesterday afternoon which would never have been even thought of under any circumstances during the period when we were getting on well together. And this morning we had a snap and snarl question session and we saw the petulant behavior of the Prime Minister even though, mind you, it was mild compared with what many of us have seen in the house in years past. Under these circumstances people become very concerned.

What do you think happened in the British house the other night when closure was brought on? Nobody has thrown order papers in this house; nobody has seen such a tumult. It does not matter about the subject matter, it is the attitude that is important. Closure and the guillotine, unless agreed upon, will never result in any greater volume of work going