

Motion under S.O. 75C

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I notice that the minister in his all too short speech on an important matter has indicated that there is too much time spent on bills rather than too little. But he conveniently forgot to tell the House that on two successive Fridays this government had no legislative program to present and, accordingly, the House had to adjourn.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Alexander: I blame the incompetence of the government, particularly that of the government House leader. It is up to him, in consultation, to bring about meaningful negotiations in order that legislation may move forward. There has been some confusion with regard to the position of my party on this bill. I would think it has been conveniently ignored. Therefore, I will read the last paragraph of the speech I made on February 1:

● (1510)

The minister may not have to accept this amendment, but in the long run the onus of proof is on him. So, subject to the several reservations I have mentioned, we will support the bill at second reading in order to get it into committee where many questions can be asked and answers given, hopefully to make this bill a much better one than it is at present.

For some reason the minister comes in with closure. Why? I read a statement in this morning's paper. The minister said, "Why should we be subject to the tyranny of a minority?" What the minister is stating, in effect, is "Damn the opposition. We are the masters of this House". This is further evidence of the arrogance of this government and highlights its usual complete disregard of the role of the opposition. This government has as its view and its principle, in terms of the opposition, that it is a rubber-stamp. We do not accept that. If that is what the minister is trying to convey, we totally disagree with him. In my humble estimation, I believe that is his conclusion.

Why should we be subject to the incompetence and stupidity of this government? The minister brings in an extremely controversial and highly inflammatory bill at a time of high unemployment. It is unprecedented. He brings in this bill when there has been no indication whatever from the treasury benches with regard to what they are going to do in terms of job creation. How naive can this government be, in particular the minister, to believe that when discussing the UIC bill members would not refer to the dismal failure of the government with respect to job creation, unemployment, growth and problems of regional economic expansion?

The government has brought in closure, or allocation of time, because it has been embarrassed by its own members who have criticized, not in this House but by running to the press and screaming loud and clear that they are not going to vote for this bill. The minister became worried and he panicked. The minister said that closure should be used more often to get bills through the House. I admit there is a right on behalf of the government, but it should only be used when there is evidence of a filibuster, of unreasonable time being spent on debating a bill. I respectfully suggest that the minis-

[Mr. Cullen.]

ter has not met this criterion in terms of bringing in this motion for closure.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: What are the facts? We have had four days of debate, two of which were short days. Notice the scenario, Mr. Speaker: the bill was brought in on February 1, a long day; it was brought forward again on February 2, a short day; then we had a long absence of ministerial interest in this bill. It came up again on Friday, February 25, a short day, and again on Monday, February 28, a long day. We have had four days, two of which were short days.

Miss MacDonald: How many speakers?

Mr. Alexander: There were four Liberals in the House, and many outside the House. Four Liberals spoke on this bill of such interest and concern and so contentious. There were eleven Conservatives, six NDP and two Social Credit. Contrary to what the minister states, that is 23 speakers out of 258, given the fact that there are six vacancies.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): That is only 10 per cent.

Mr. Alexander: As I read it, and we are not going to quibble about minutes, we have had 12 hours and 50 minutes debate on an extremely important and very contentious bill. Only four Liberals spoke on a bill of such significance. Notice the breakdown, Mr. Speaker. We have 135 Liberals, of whom four spoke; 96 Progressive Conservatives, of whom 11 spoke; 16 NDP, of whom six spoke; and ten Social Credit, of which two spoke. You can see the trend. The Liberals were muzzled even before they brought in closure.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: Because of the embarrassment this government is faced with in terms of its own members, in order to shut them up, to muzzle them, they bring in a blanket clause under which not even the opposition can speak.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: I am glad the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane) had a good time in Mexico. I do not know what he did there. I hope he will continue trying to play a meaningful role in the House of Commons, rather than travelling around the country on some junket. This place will work as long as we have meaningful negotiation and co-operation, not confrontation. I am the first to admit there is something wrong with this place in terms of debating time and the number of speakers. However, the way to correct it is not by bringing in closure.

The Minister said we had discussed this matter under Standing Orders 75A and 75B. There was no discussion except for them to say they wanted to allocate time, and we said no. That is confrontation with respect to parliamentary democracy. Speaking for my party, we totally reject the government's reasons for closure or allocation of time.