

*Procedure and Organization*

on clauses 2 and 3 and the following clauses. I think there were five or six in all. There were protests and points of order, but in a short space of time Mr. Howe and Walter Harris, who was leading the house, said that we had had a debate on those five or six clauses and that the closure rule would be applied. Mr. King, by the way, in the mid-1930's attacked Mr. Bennett very strongly for having done something like that and quoted Mr. Meighen as having said that the closure rule could not be applied until there has been reasonable debate. But Mr. Bennett applied closure in that way in 1932 or 1933 and Mr. Howe applied it that way in 1956.

Under the closure rule the debate could be concluded in 40 or 50 seconds. Similarly, under 75c a minister could utter one or two sentences and then move the adjournment of the debate. The house leader could then get up and say, "By the way, I have not been able to obtain agreement so I move under 75c that the debate be limited to one day."

**An hon. Member:** It could be a Wednesday.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Yes, it could be a Wednesday, which is a short day. That is what could happen in respect of the second reading stage. Look also at what could happen at the report stage. While it is not stated in the report and the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) has not yet taken part in this debate, he has read what I have said and I have read what he said as reported in the newspapers. I understand the reason he feels Standing Order 33 is not adequate is that we now have the report stage and there was no report stage when Standing Order 33 was adopted.

At the report stage we could have 5, 10 or 20 amendments just as we did in respect of the omnibus Criminal Code bill. A motion could be brought in to terminate the debate at the report stage after one day. So if there were 10 or 20 amendments on the order paper for the report stage, a one day debate would allow discussion on one or two of them and no debate on the others. This kind of process of using the closure rule to cut off debate even before there is an opportunity to debate and vote on amendments was described by King in 1933, I believe, as the most oppressive abuse of parliamentary procedure he had ever heard of. This is what we are up against. This kind of rule would permit at the report stage what Bennett and Howe did. The report stage would be out the window.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

In the very good package of rules we brought in last December there were several extremely valuable things. I think we did well in getting many items off the floor of the house into committee such as the estimates and the committee stage of bills. I think parliament operates better because of this. But I also believe that one of the rule changes which has proven to be very worth while is the report stage. This means that a bill which has been dealt with in detail in a standing committee can be dealt with on the floor of the house by members zeroing in on contentious issues. But if all of a sudden the government house leader can bring in a proposal that the whole report stage, no matter how many amendments there are, be limited to one day, then the value of this tremendous innovation, I suggest, is out the window.

So despite the explanation of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton that the rule is very good and is an advance by parliament in meeting the problems of our time and all the rest of it, I submit it is a form of closure even more forceful than the one in Standing Order 33. If time permitted I would have liked to go back and read some of the things that were said about closure in 1913 by a great Canadian statesman. I refer to Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Even I was not here then, but from reading *Hansard* it would appear that he must have been an orator par excellence. But I say, as a result of reading his speeches, it was evident that he was at his best when he was denouncing the government of that day for limiting the right of free speech in parliament. I remind members opposite that he stood in this chamber—not this chamber but the one that was burned down—and said he would rather be here and out of office than to have remained in power by the power of the gag, that true Liberalism believes in freedom of speech and would not use its majority to impose that kind of limitation on parliament.

• (4:10 p.m.)

I urge very strongly that we settle in, accept the fact that we are going to have a few days of debate, and hope that within those few days we can settle this matter in the proper way. Last night's debate was not in vain; we got rid of a motion that was out of order and we are now dealing with this matter on a proper basis. Last December's debate was not in vain, despite the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said just afterwards that we had fallen into a trap. We got a good package of rules and left 16A out. I hope the result of this debate will be that