

*Motion for Concurrence in Report*

debating time and when both sides have expressed their views.

The government has the responsibility and the mandate of governing and introducing measures in parliament which are deemed to be in the national interest, and it is the government which will have to answer to the people for its neglect or its procrastination in having its legislative program passed.

Although I recognize the inalienable right of parliament to study, criticize or change the measures put before it, it is necessary to reconcile those two imperatives which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I believe the changes proposed in the fourth and fifth reports of our committee will provide precisely that: better use of the time, which is of necessity limited during a session, without depriving the members, and especially the opposition, of their undisputed right to discuss and criticize the proposals of the government and this, at the various stages and especially in committee where all the estimates and the vast majority of bills are studied. This would allow a more comprehensive, constructive and efficient study, under much more favourable conditions.

● (4:20 p.m.)

It must be recognized that the volume and complexity of public affairs can only grow through the years and take up more and more of the time of parliament, while recognizing, on the other hand, that an unlimited right to debate and discuss all matters is a luxury we can no longer afford because, in fact, it could become a barrier, an obstacle to the orderly and legitimate study of the business of the country.

The members who have been here for several years know full well that the opposition did not limit itself to criticism and opposition; it deliberately and systematically obstructed the passing of certain bills which were eventually agreed to by the majority of the members, but only after repetitions and a waste of time which only served to reduce the efficiency and prestige of parliament.

It is recognized that government proposals or bills can be changed or improved through the suggestions of the members in the house or in committee. Besides, the government must not expect to be given a free hand, but it must be ready to justify its measures, to amend them or, if need be, to withdraw them; however, that does not usually happen after

[Mr. Forest.]

interminable and repetitious debates. A legislative assembly must not place itself in a position where a decision can be delayed indefinitely.

The members opposite have maintained that the government now has the means at its disposal to limit the debate. Indeed, the previous question concentrates the debate on the main motion, but that does not necessarily mean, in practice, that the debate is substantially reduced. In fact, the motion can be debated, but its restrictions are such that it is impractical and rarely used. It was used, for instance, in 1955, during the debate on an act concerning the Department of Defence Production. It did not alter the length of the discussions.

The best known means, although it is rarely used, is that commonly known as the rule of closure which, since it was passed in 1913, has only been used 16 times only. This method of limiting the debating time now appears odious in our country, even though it is very often used in the United Kingdom, in somewhat different circumstances. It is a method which is difficult to implement and which requires notice and a special motion. The 1956 experience showed to what extent debates on procedure can last when such means are proposed. It is also applied when a difficulty arises and the debate becomes fierce and when feelings are running high.

It is used to bring to an end a particular debate or consideration of a motion when a reasonable time for each stage of a bill has to be planned ahead of time. The closure rule still exists, as mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) but I submit that experience has proved this is not a practical solution for the government, or even sufficient protection of the rights of the opposition.

In 1956 and on other occasions, the house raised important questions on the interpretation given to that rule which does not clearly specify what motions are affected by a particular proposal to end a debate. Therefore, it is an impractical method which is difficult to apply and which does not solve at all the difficulty of planning the parliamentary year or calendar.

The opposition leader (Mr. Stanfield) stressed in his speech Tuesday that discussions must remain within certain limits, and I quote:

There must be reasonable limits upon the time parliament spends in discussion.