

Time Allocation

represents any lack of interest by the Opposition but, rather, explains the real situation in the House of Commons.

There are 211 Government members and an Opposition, divided between two Parties, with 40 members and 30 members. Not only must those Opposition members serve on the old standing committees of the House of Commons, under the new rules they are serving on the numerous legislative committees as well. This creates a problem.

While I would criticize Liberal members for their initial lack of participation with respect to Bill C-74, we must recognize that when there are only 70 Opposition members divided between two Parties who must have representation on the various committees of the House, there will be times when the Government is in a position to use its majority to exhaust the number of our speakers on a particular Bill. The Government could have us sitting on so many committees at a particular time that it would be almost impossible for us to have a Member in the House who has not already spoken to a piece of legislation.

● (1130)

That is part of the reality of the situation. Instead of continually using time allocation when the Opposition in the House of Commons is so small, the Government, if it believed in democracy and the parliamentary reform package about which we have talked so much lately, would not be using the manoeuvre that it uses so often.

Earlier I said that I would be quoting comments of Conservative Members of Parliament about time allocation. The first person I should like to quote is the new Government Whip, the Hon. Member for Ontario (Mr. Fennell). He said:

Closure is the mechanism put in place by the Liberal Party to shut us up. It is a disgrace to Parliament . . . to my constituents and to Canadian citizens at large . . . It should not be permitted in the House.

I should like to turn to the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), one of the more eloquent Members. When he was in Opposition, what did he say when the Government brought in time allocation?

Mr. Rodriguez: What did he say?

Mr. Murphy: He said that it was "a sneaky, dirty trick", and referring to the Minister who brought in the motion, he said: "You are a snake". Those quotations indicate the hypocrisy of Conservative Members who spoke against time allocation when in Opposition but use it now that they are in Government on a continuing basis.

A lot of time was spent in committee looking at this piece of legislation. Witnesses appeared before us. Amendments were accepted by the Government. We, as a House, passed some amendments and defeated others. All that happened. As I have done on other occasions, one can lay blame on the Liberal Party for not attending at committee when it is necessary. One could lay blame on certain members of the Liberal caucus for not understanding what was being debated in the House at report stage. I have done that in the past. They should have been aware of what was happening when the legislation was

brought back to the House. However, we are now in third reading and have to recognize the right of the Liberal Party—and I am certainly not a defender of that Party—to change its mind and to discover things in the Bill which affect the Province of Quebec. They want an opportunity in the House to make their points. Also, those of us who think the Liberals are wrong in what they are saying should have an opportunity to make our points.

We are speaking out about a Bill which affects a very fundamental issue—how we determine representation in the House of Commons. It is an important piece of legislation. It not only affects how many seats each province has, but it effects how power is distributed in the House of Commons. The more seats we have and the more seats we are guaranteed in the future will have some influence on power in the House. Just as important is that we consider how a Member of Parliament is able to represent his constituents. That is reflected in the rules affecting the redistribution of seats in Bill C-74. It is important that we understand what we are doing and that the public understands it without any misconceptions.

As I have said, I am very happy with the amendments to which the Government agreed which were made at the request of the Opposition. I support those two amendments, but I cannot support the legislation because, although it is sound legislation for the next redistribution based upon the 1984 census, there is no guarantee that it will be sound in the long term. The Government has created a flaw by dividing the population of Canada by the number 279. That is based upon a formula which knocks off two seats for the Northwest Territories and the seat in Yukon. Those seats are guaranteed, but the present population of Canada, based upon the latest census, is divided by 279 to determine theoretically the average seat size in Canada. That sounds good on paper, but it does not recognize that when the House has 293 or 296 seats in the future, there is no rationale in the world for using 279 as the denominator. The House would already be 16 or 19 seats larger than that particular figure. Since it has been guaranteed that no provinces will lose any seats, a strain or artificial limit, in terms of numbers of seats, is placed upon provinces with growing populations.

We should have a chance to express that concern in the House, and we should look at some way of resolving it. The only reason I have accepted the legislation, even though I intend to vote against it, is that it is okay for the next 10 years and it might be okay in the future depending upon what happens with population. However, it is a flawed piece of legislation. If the Government were wise, it would look at ways of removing those flaws rather than depending on the fact that 10 years from now some future Government could change the legislation, which has been the argument of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn).

In closing, I should like to say that time allocation has been introduced six times. The Finance Committee, which is considering Bill C-84 containing 235 pages, is choking off debate after three days of study. What are we doing? Why do we even talk about representation in the House of Commons if the