

*Government Orders*

strong and the weak. Protection of a majority against obstruction and protection of a minority against oppression are both alike functions of the Chair”.

In Parliament, as it now stands, the opposition is perpetually and chronically weak thanks to the unilateral rule changes brought in, in April 1991, and protection of the minority against oppression should now be your major concern. I submit to you that this time allocation motion is just that kind of oppression which you need to protect the minority from.

• (1525 )

Mr. Speaker, in 1987 you asked the question reflecting on the manner in which you were elected as to whether or not the House of Commons had matured “enough to confer upon its presiding officer the discretionary powers necessary to control abuse and resolve deadlocks that the British House of Commons gave its Speaker over a century ago”. You said then that you believed the Canadian House of Commons had matured to that point. On that basis you acted to break the deadlock.

I now ask you to act on the same basis to control abuse in a Parliament that has seen more time allocation in which the opposition is weaker and in which the idea of giving the Speaker such discretion has come into its own. Indeed, a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on House Management recently recommended to the full committee that such discretion on the part of the Speaker be part of the full committee’s report to the House on parliamentary reform that could be tabled any day now.

There is a recognition that with increased government powers must come some other form of checking abuses of power. This checking mechanism used to be the role of the opposition but which is no more thanks to the rule changes that I mentioned before.

The time allocation now before us on NAFTA is in my judgment and that of my colleagues just the sort of situation in which the Speaker’s role is crucial. Indeed, if this is not the kind of situation that demands the intervention of the Chair, it is hard to imagine what would be and therefore what meaning there might be in having the Speaker exercise such discretion.

Mr. Speaker, Parliament is in your hands. On April 14 you said: “Notice of time allocation motions after only a few hours of debate at any stage of a bill can also be an

abuse”. This is exactly what we have before us this afternoon. If the North American free trade agreement can be rushed through the House of Commons with just two days’ debate then Canadians will have just cause to despair about their Parliament as a place where important issues are adequately debated. We in the NDP caucus call on you to exercise your discretion and refuse to entertain, or to call the vote, on the time allocation motion on Bill C-115 until you are satisfied that there has been adequate debate on second reading.

Finally, I appeal to that which you have often appealed to yourself, and that is common sense. It is that profound sense, as you once described it, of what is appropriate under certain circumstances and what is acceptable to reasonable people.

May I ask that at the very least, given what I believe to be the historic significance of the judgment you are being called upon to make not in terms of the North American free trade agreement but in terms of Parliament, that you take whatever time is necessary to reflect on the issue before you and ask the government to withdraw its motion until you have had ample time to consider the matter.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, I endorse what my colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona said.

[*English*]

He has made a very eloquent plea based on a past ruling of yours in another sense on another subject that I think is relevant to the debate today.

In 1988 when I was first elected to this House, the House of Commons spent almost two weeks debating a free trade agreement. This new agreement substantially modifies the original free trade agreement and in fact is a replacement for it.

The legislation this time is even more voluminous than what it was in 1988. In 1988 we had a lengthy debate in this House on free trade and closure was used by the government at every stage. The argument that was put forward to justify the use of closure at that time, as you will well recall, Mr. Speaker, was that there had been adequate debate on this bill before: the subject matter had been debated in the previous Parliament and then there was an extensive public debate throughout the election campaign. This time there has been no previous