

Proposal for Time Allocation

That is the government's thesis expressed in simple terms.

Members of the cabinet colour this plain and simple objective by certain phraseologies. They talk about modernization, streamlining and speeding up of our procedures. I am not aware of any period of time since I have been around here when there has been a greater degree of mismanagement by a government of the business of this house than there has been in the last few years. Items have not been brought forward on the order paper although they have been mentioned in speeches from the throne. Even when they are brought forward they are in such bad shape they have to be withdrawn, modified and changed to a great extent. Whenever one finds scores of amendments to a bill he must conclude that the government has prepared that bill badly. The members of the opposition have bailed out the government on numerous occasions during this session in order that measures could be passed. This has happened on so many occasions it would be difficult to recount them. This has been a session of mismanagement and it is being mismanaged now.

The leader of the New Democratic party suggested that the business committee set up last week should be left to arrange the business of this house. Let me remind him of the house committee which meets frequently to make arrangements in this regard. The business committee appointed last week met on Friday. It did not meet on Monday but met on Tuesday at 2:15 and reported to the house at 2.30. The only purpose of that committee was to decide whether we should consider this bill for two, three or five days during the committee of the whole discussion, and one or two days during third reading. It was hoped that I would bring forward the suggestion at that business committee that we should limit the number of days to the number suggested by the government.

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question regarding the number of times the business committee met? Does he not feel that he should state that certain representatives of various parties on the business committee were in accord and that the committee felt it was necessary to meet more often? Will he not also admit that discussions continued with the hon. member on behalf of his group during the intervals between the meetings?

Mr. Churchill: The government house leader can place whatever interpretation he likes on what happened. In my opinion a business committee should meet on each of the three days set aside for that purpose. There should not be individual consultations. I do not know what took place during discussions between members of that committee and the hon. member for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette), for example. That hon. member did not attend the meetings, nor did any member of his party.

The proposition I put forward earlier had nothing to do with what took place at the meetings of the business committee. I put forward a Conservative party proposition to the government house leader. This suggestion was considered by the business committee as a matter of interest and, perhaps, importance. It involved a package deal in respect of the general business of the house.

● (8:30 p.m.)

I am not sure that the business committee has been of any great value. The house leaders can do all this without going through the motions of calling the business committee. It should be decided whether we should spend one or two days on the bill in committee of the whole house, and how much time should be spent on third reading. The government should make that decision. If the government proposes to impose closure through allocation of time, let them say exactly how much time they are going to give the house. This is all I would ask of the business committee. If the government has the assurance of support from the New Democratic party, the Social Credit party and the Cr ditistes, naturally the Conservative representative has to give in because he is only one in a committee of four.

However, Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to dwell on that aspect of the matter and will conclude by saying that I think it is unsound to attempt to enforce closure on the House of Commons. Freedom of speech in this chamber should be carefully guarded. An opposition that yields to a restriction on freedom of speech is derelict in its duty. This is basically why we must oppose closure, no matter what name it comes under. Whether it is called allocation of time or anything else, it is none the less closure; it is an imposition on freedom of speech, and we are expressing our opposition to it.

Mr. Winch: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Churchill: Yes, go ahead.