

I am informed that the facts are somewhat quite different. In fact the bill has been in the House of Commons for five solid weeks. There has been a great number of opportunities for hon. members to make contributions to the debate on the bill. One of the difficulties, and I think opposition members have pointed out a real problem, is that not very much time has been spent in Committee of the Whole House.

The interesting thing about the bill, of course, is that it originated in the budget of the former minister of finance, the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald), sometime last spring.

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think it is very much a point of order that none of us should sit here and have misstatements going on the record. This bill has not been before the House for five weeks.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. When time limitation was brought in on second reading, the opposition had five hours for debate. They could not even muster enough speakers to use the five hours.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Reid:** I certainly apologize to hon. members if I was mistaken, and that we have not spent five weeks on this particular debate.

**Mr. Stevens:** You were misinformed.

**Mr. Reid:** My understanding at least is that it was four weeks.

**Mr. MacDonald (Egmont):** It's coming down.

**Mr. Reid:** I am now informed that we spent some 32 days—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Reid:**—which seems to me, the way the House of Commons spends its time—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** Order, please. The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) has the floor. We should all listen to him.

**Mr. Stevens:** He should stick to the facts.

**Mr. Alexander:** Let him say something honest.

**Mr. Reid:** The only point I want to make is that we had plenty of time to discuss the bill in general but not enough to discuss it in Committee of the Whole. The problem is that members are great on the generalities but not so great when it comes down to the specifics.

One of the frustrations that members have is the fact that we still use the Committee of the Whole House for finance bills. It is clear to me that this system is archaic and useless. If

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we had any intelligence, we would take the finance bills as we take all other bills, send them off to committees, allowing the committees the freedom with finance bills that we have with every other bill. They could call outside witnesses and outside experts who could prepare themselves before appearing in front of the committees.

When we put this bill in the Committee of the Whole House, we limit ourselves in what we can do with it. We cannot bring other people into the House to hear testimony, and find out what we can do with the bill. In effect, we limit the bill as it is before us, that is, to the opinion of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) and of the Department of Finance. In financial matters, we ought to try to cut a wider swath as with any other bill.

I recognize that when the rules were reformed it was considered we would make a distinction between the bills that were sent to committees and those which would stay on the floor of the House of Commons. To give greater prestige to the finance bills, it was decided to leave them on the floor of the House. It is amusing that, in the seven or ten years we have been working under this system, we have discovered that the least efficient way of handling these bills is the choice we made, that is, to deal with them on the floor of the House of Commons.

What happens? Members spend all their time on second reading. When we come to the Committee of the Whole, members are unable to comprehend fully all of the technicalities. Ministers often have that problem as well. Instead of being in a forum where we can get technical assistance and have people come before the committee or the House, we cannot do that because of what we have done. One of the things we should look at is to get rid of this archaic system of having the finance bills passed in committee on the floor of the House of Commons. It simply does not work.

The second point I want to make is with regard to the question of closure, time allocation, or whatever one wishes to call it. Basically, we do not use our time very well in the House of Commons. It is a great tragedy that, with a technical bill such as a finance bill, we will spend very little time actually going over the technical details of it. This would have happened with this bill regardless of closure or not.

We have to come to some kind of agreement among ourselves that we will limit what we do on second reading and spend more time in committee studying the details of legislation. There very seldom is legislation brought into the House of Commons without any kind of warning, that is, as a surprise. Basically we know what the government's plan is and we know what will be brought forward. Therefore we have to start focusing on how we use our time.

There is a whole series of other legislation before us. We have not been able to get to it because we have spent all our time dealing with this finance bill and the Speech from the Throne. Those are the only two items we have had, plus the elections bill.