

Procedure and Organization

[English]

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I have only a limited time.

Mr. Baldwin: We will give you extra time.

Mr. Bell: We will give the President of the Privy Council extra time, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. Does the hon. member for Lotbinière wish to direct a question to the minister?

Mr. Fortin: I wish to rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): The hon. member for Lotbinière rises on a point of order.

Mr. Fortin: It seems to me that since standing order 75c has not yet been carried, it may still be dealt with in this house, Mr. Speaker.

I should like to ask the minister whether his intention is to eventually become more Canadian than British. We have heard enough of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order.

[English]

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The question has been raised on many occasions, why has not closure been used? For example, it was raised a great deal in connection with the omnibus Criminal Code bill and people asked why closure was not used at that time in order to shut off the debate. This was particularly so in connection with the very lengthy debate that occurred at the report stage of that bill. The shortest answer to that question is that in effect Standing Order 33 is not effective in dealing with our new procedures. In particular, it is not effective in dealing with the report stage when you can have, as we did in the debate on the Criminal Code bill, many different questions, each one of which would have to be the subject of a closure motion.

I believe I am right in saying that 44 amendments were filed in the omnibus Criminal Code debate, and by the ruling of the Chair that number was reduced to around 30. Given the fact that under Standing Order 33 closure requires two sitting days to run its full course, this would have meant that 60 days or a longer period would have been necessary to close off that stage alone. In other words, I think it is important that we have this new procedure.

When we adopted the new procedure last December we failed to provide for the eventuality, which subsequently was proven to be an actuality, that the debate would be prolonged at the report stage far beyond a reasonable discussion of the issues.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, would the President of the Privy Council permit a question?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Yes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Will he deal with the point I tried to make, that that situation could have been dealt with under 75B? I recognize the report stage problem, but I wonder whether 75A or 75B would not be sufficient to deal with the situation.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): As I have said, Mr. Speaker, if the two minor parties, that is, the hon. gentleman and his colleagues and the party to his left, were not in agreement with the time allocation, we would be no farther ahead; we would have, in effect, a deadlock in the house brought about by the agreement of the two minor parties. Again may I point out that the difference with regard to Standing Order 33 is this: under proposed standing order 75c there is an obligation on the part of the minister to consult with the parties in accordance with the consultation process. This is prerequisite to his attempting the programming.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Oh, oh.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The hon. member may laugh, but the fact of the matter is that under 75c the procedure cannot be used unless there has been advance consultation. The final objection—this is really the basic objection—of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is that with regard to a small minority in this house, or even with respect to the minority in the house represented by the united opposition parties, the majority should not be able to compel a decision as to the amount of time to be taken on a bill. I would point out that there is also, in effect, minority closure; that is to say, there is the position that the house is put in when so much time is taken on one or two measures, such as was taken in this session by the Ralliement Crétitiste on the Criminal Code bill, that as a result a dozen measures are left on the order paper and could not be dealt with.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.