

*Time Allocation for Bill C-30*

I ask hon. members to listen to this next sentence:

All hon. members have co-operated—

That includes the member for St. John's West and it includes me. The sentence continues:

—and now we are desperately trying to find out what will be the next item of business before four o'clock.

We were passing so many items on Friday that the government wondered how it would fill the day. Which way do government members want it? Do they want an opposition that is co-operative or an opposition that is trying to stall? We are not stalling, Mr. Speaker. We are insisting on the right of this House of Commons to know what the government's financial plans are before we sign a blank cheque, which is what it amounts to if we are called upon to pass this motion for closure and to settle this debate with one more day.

I had assumed until I asked my question a moment ago that one more day would at least be a full day, at least a Thursday or a Friday, which has a few more debating hours in it than a Wednesday.

**An hon. Member:** What about Saturday?

**Mr. Pinard:** Why not on Wednesday?

**Mr. Knowles:** The President of the Privy Council asks "Why not on Wednesday?" In other words, the government is prepared to use a rule that was brought in under closure to close off debate, and no amount of semantics, of trying to use euphemisms and saying that it is just time limitation, will get away from the fact that what they are doing is cutting off debate.

The minister says that it is time for some reforms around here, and I agree with him. I have heard that statement many times. But is it not time that we deal with something basic? The only kinds of reforms that we hear from over there are shortening the length of speeches or cutting down to a four-day week—

**An hon. Member:** Then a three-day week.

**Mr. Knowles:** A four-day week will soon be a three-day week, that is right—or sitting mornings instead of evenings and so on. But we hear nothing about the fundamental problem that faces this House, and that is organizing our time from the beginning of the session.

What this Parliament needs—and it has been agreed many a time in meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization—is a government that tells us at the start of the session what is to be before us and invites both sides of the House to sit down and discuss the line up of bills. If we do that, we can agree that some bills are unimportant and do not need to be debated on the floor of the House of Commons and that they can be sent right off to committee. We can agree that there are many bills that should be limited to one or two days of debate on second reading. But surely, along with that, along with the House being willing to let some bills go without debate and many bills to be given limited debate, it would be

understandable that when we get to the crucial bills there should be whatever debate the House feels is necessary.

In my view, that is the kind of reform that we should be dealing with. I quite agree that the main problem facing us is how to use our time. I have seen this problem grow in intensity in the years since I first came here. In those early days we could get through a session in five or six months, and while we complained we seemed to have dealt with everything. But the things that have to be dealt with now are so numerous, there has to be co-operation. One does not get co-operation by bringing in closure, threatening more use of closure, threatening to change the rules or threatening to cut down the length of time used on speeches. I want to say parenthetically that I think that the 40-minute rule is one that should be changed. I certainly think that no speech needs to be that long. Members will see today that debates where speeches are limited to ten minutes go a bit faster, and perhaps when the rest of the members get going they will make still better speeches. But to think that that is the answer, just to cut the 40 minutes down to 20 minutes or 15 minutes when a government does not plan a session as it should and as it could, is a failure to recognize what Parliament is all about.

I emphasize the point that what we are faced with is a form of closure just as mean and vindictive and hard on the opposition as was the closure that the Tories brought in against the Sir Wilfrid Laurier Liberals back in 1913. It is the wrong way to cope with the problems of this House.

**An hon. Member:** Were you there?

**Mr. Knowles:** My hon. friend wants to know if I was here in 1913. The answer is no, not yet.

**An hon. Member:** Just on your way.

**Mr. Knowles:** But I can tell my hon. friend that there is no better reading in the pages of *Hansard* than the debate of 1913, especially the contributions that Sir Wilfrid Laurier made, on this very issue.

I see that my time is about up, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to sit down, but I want to say categorically that this is an abomination, an offence to Parliament, a failure to realize the best way to run this place, and when the vote is called tonight the New Democrats will stand and vote no.

**Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, in this debate I would like to answer some of the comments made by the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), but before I do so, since my name was taken somewhat in vain by my friend the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) concerning last Friday—

**Mr. Knowles:** That was a compliment!

**Mr. Collenette:** —may I say that I did make those statements. I was flabbergasted on Friday afternoon that we had so much co-operation from the other side and we had to scurry around for more business. The opposition is ready, willing and