

Government Orders

Mr. Riis: I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that regardless of how any of us might feel about the government using closure and time allocation on a regular basis, and trying to give the impression that this is somehow being based on the practices of the Mother of Parliament in the United Kingdom, is absolutely and totally false. There is no connection between the two in terms of how they deal with legislation.

I know that this is the desire of the Prime Minister to enable him to move his political agenda through the House of Commons with as little public comment as possible because when the people of Canada understand what this legislation is all about, they oppose it. In the GST, we now have 85 per cent of the people saying they oppose that legislation.

As my hon. friend from the official opposition who just spoke indicated, if the GST was not dominating people, like the public consciousness, and people understood that right now the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister of Canada want to dismantle Petro-Canada, that it wants to destroy the national oil company that belongs to the people of Canada and turn it over to American oil interests, the people of Canada would be speaking out again.

I say on behalf of the New Democratic Party that we oppose this type of procedural tactic in the House of Commons to limit debate. We oppose what the government is doing in terms of dismantling one more fabric of what Canada is all about. We will never accept the kind of dictatorial totalitarian approach to parliamentary democracy and our parliamentary system now or in the future.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I do not often get the privilege of entering into a debate, and I did not intend to enter into this one. However, I have to admit that watching and listening to my hon. friend from the New Democratic Party inspired me to rise to my feet to enter into this debate for a few minutes.

The question of time allocation is one that has for a long time been a matter of controversy within this House because the opposition parties have consistently said that there is something wrong with time allocation, that we should not be using time allocation, that it is disgusting behaviour on the part of the government, that it has no

right to do it, that it should not be doing it, and on and on and on.

The reality is that time allocation and closure are a part of the rules of the House of Commons. Why are they a part of the rules of the House of Commons? It is because the tradition in this House which has gone on for years and years—certainly more years than I have been around—has made it very clear that from time to time there have to be provisions that allow a government to proceed with its legislation.

That was put in there because there has always been a concern as to whether or not the government can continue to put forward its legislative agenda. The man on the street understands that. He recognizes that a government that was given a majority in the House of Commons was given that majority for one purpose, and that purpose was to allow it to complete its legislative agenda.

Why are we into a debate on time allocation this morning? Is it because the people across Canada are angry about it? No, I do not think that is the case at all. Is it because the opposition and the government have been able to come to an agreement on how this bill ought to be debated and handled in the House of Commons at the second reading stage, the committee stage, the report stage, and the third reading stage? No, in fact it is quite the contrary.

What the opposition failed to see and to mention in its speeches is that the government on a regular basis puts forward a number of pieces of legislation. Each of those pieces of legislation is designed and put forward to be dealt with in a certain time frame that fits with the scheduled sittings of this House.

As a result, we have been successful in previous sessions and periods of time negotiating among parties a calendar with which all parties could deal. The purpose of that was of course to allow more debate on bills that had a higher degree of controversy. The trade-off was to have less debate on those bills that do not have the same degree of controversy.

We are faced with exactly that situation today. As I stand before you in this fall session of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, what we are faced with is that we as a government have a fairly extensive legislative agenda. That agenda has been put before other members of this House and certainly the other parties of this House.