

Business of the House

1969 because it is becoming a political instrument in the hands of the government whenever it wishes to gloss over a problem or ignore an important or controversial issue, as is the case with Bill C-83.

If the debate were to last for too long, the public would have enough time to realize the nonsense the government is ramming down their throats through this legislation. Therefore the government is simply reducing the discussion period to a maximum of four days. That is why I say that Standing Order 75C is an anti-democratic political tool. What other logical reason could there be to limit the time spent on debating this bill?

Are there very few bills before the House? Is there any problem in the country which calls for an emergency debate today and which would require the time of the House? The government has not given us any proof of that. Bill C-83 now before us is very important and its implications are many. Many members had expressed the desire to take part, in conformity with democratic principles, in this debate on second reading.

Then why is the government trying everything to limit these discussions, if not prevent the opposition from doing its work, thus making sure the public has no time to react; for public opinion is beginning to get involved.

If the government does not want to manage in a democratic way, it should say so openly and stop this charade to make believe that discussions in Parliament are not useless. At the same time it could tell us how the real powers governing the country—those who administer it and introduce legislation—are out of the House and Parliament and can be found in the hands of big financiers and enterprises that take care of the Liberal party fund.

When the government takes out this blackjack that article 75C of the Standing Orders represents, less than 10 per cent of the members of this House have spoken on second reading of this legislation. There were 28 speakers out of 265 members and ministers, as follows: 11 Liberals, 11 Progressive-Conservatives, three New Democrats and three Social Crediters.

It is now suggested that the debate be limited to four days only. If we look at the schedule of the House business, it may happen that such days be allocated as follows: three short days and only one long day, which will further reduce the time allocated to hon. members. Tomorrow, Friday, is a short day, because the House does not sit in the evening. Next Monday and Tuesday will be devoted to the consideration of the electoral boundaries reform. Wednesday and Friday will be short days and Thursday, April 8, will be the only long day devoted to the consideration of Bill C-83.

Mr. Speaker, there is something else I would like to point out before concluding. By ending the debate on this bill, the government gives the impression that it is irregular that on second reading the House should devote more time to some bills than to others. As if all legislation should be equally important and require the same time, which is totally wrong and illogical.

Mr. Speaker, when it is impossible to have democracy serve one's own purposes, one is sometimes willing to resort to force. This is how I see this motion which was introduced today pursuant to the provisions of Standing

Order 75C. The entire government army, with its back bench mercenaries, is now fighting against democracy and we have the proof.

In the Middle East they have the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization. Here in the House of Commons we have the Liberal party which, through this silencer motion, becomes Parliament's PLO, the Parliamentary Liberties Ostracizer, so to speak.

● (1620)

[*English*]

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, the government has moved that Bill C-83 be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs after four more days of debate. The motion is moved under this section simply because we could not receive agreement under the other sections of the rule having to do with time allocation. As has already been pointed out, this will mean that there will be ten days of debate on what, under the rules of the House, is supposed to be the principle of the bill, not the detail of the bill.

For those unaccustomed to parliamentary procedures, I want to put on the record, as did the House leader, that this bill will go to committee for clause by clause, word by word examination by the members of that committee. The committee will call witnesses. The committee is comprised of good members from all sides of the House; there are lawyers and experts of one sort or another on the justice and legal affairs committee. The bill is then reported from the committee back to the House for consideration of changes made in committee and for third reading. The same process is then repeated in the other place, the Senate. By no imagination, Mr. Speaker, is this rushing legislation.

The debate so far, of which we have four more days to go, has confirmed my own belief that amendments to the criminal law of this country are complex, intricate measures that require detailed and careful examination in a committee. It has confirmed that there are misunderstandings of the proposals made in Bill C-83 which can only be cleared up in committee. It has confirmed that there are many groups in this country that need and want to be heard on the bill. If the opposition does not want to provide them with an opportunity to be heard, then I want that clearly on the record.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Sheer sophistry.

Mr. Basford: The debate has shown that there are parts of the bill of particular contention, such as the gun control measures and the protection of privacy amendments. With regard to gun control, a number of concerns have been expressed by responsible and knowledgeable members of the House, some resulting, however, from misunderstanding which I hope is not deliberate. Questions have been raised concerning the nature of the licensing system; as to the adequacy of the firearms-use training programs; as to the nature of the rural needs and interests and the urban needs and interests of the people of this country; as to the bill's effect on gun collectors and on crime and criminality; and as to how to encourage responsible gun use.

[Mr. Beaudoin.]