

S.O. 75c

debate on the Constitution, then the government has to take some initiative.

It has to show some leadership. That has required the imposition of Standing Order 75c in this case, and I certainly do not apologize for that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Evans: With regard to the principle behind the use of Standing Order 75c, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) waxed long and, he believed, eloquent earlier this evening about when Standing Order 75c should and should not be used. To his mind it is all right to use Standing Order 75c, limitation of time for debate, as long as the bill under consideration confers benefits on someone, but if it does not confer benefits, then it is not appropriate to use Standing Order 75c. That flies right in the face of what my friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), said with respect to the principle of debate—irrespective of the bill under consideration, it is the principle of debate—and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre would stand on that principle. He spoke earlier about it. In fact, he spoke just before the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton and laid out quite clearly what the principle behind the use of Standing Order 75c is, and it has absolutely nothing to do with the content of the bill under discussion.

I would like to quote some of the words of the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton when he spoke with respect to Bill C-20 in the Thirty-first Parliament. At that time the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton indicated that he was a patient man. He went on:

I do not want the Liberal Party to try such a feeble argument that they can appear to be co-operative on the one hand and obstructive on the other. I want them to be known for what they are—obstructors. They have proven this today.

The hon. member was talking about our objections at that time to the use of Standing Order 75c by the Conservative government with regard to Bill C-20, which was with respect to mortgage interest and property tax credits.

Finally, I would like to read one more quotation from the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton as follows:

I think the opposition will strain the credulity of the public in other ways. They will be claiming that they have been cut off at the knees; that their pearls of wisdom on this bill have not been given sufficient time to be heard; that the Canadian government is so Draconian that it is cutting short the debate on Bill C-20. I think this government has been extremely generous with the opposition.

That was said after five days of debate, and we are imposing Standing Order 75c after six days of debate. I appeal to the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton to read his own words and then withdraw some of the remarks he made during his speech today.

Mr. Ron Stewart (Simcoe South): Mr. Speaker, I rise to oppose this motion, which has nothing to do with borrowing. This motion deals with closure.

I want to say at the outset that I do not agree with the previous speaker in any way, shape or form. I am becoming

increasingly alarmed about the routine application of the device of closure under the fancy name of Standing Order 79c.

Mr. Evans: Seventy-five.

Mr. Stewart: The point is that it throttles free speech. The legality of Standing Order 75c, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) mentioned this afternoon, is not the issue. I wonder if members of the government, which so readily applies closure in this House, really believe in the charter of rights for Canadians that they are espousing.

Closure was a seldom-used parliamentary strategy until this present administration assumed office. Now, three times in five months it has been invoked. When the constitutional committee reports, I think on Tuesday, what will happen then? Will it go as the old song goes, "Mr. Five by Five"? Will there be five closures in five months? The hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) said there should be relevancy. I think five out of five is very relevant, and I do not think it is rhetoric. If it is rhetoric, then I am all for it. I was denied the right to speak on behalf of my constituents during the budget debate. Why? Because of closure. I was denied the right to express my views and the views of my electors during the Constitution resolution debate. Why? Again, because of closure.

This afternoon the House leader said it was not members of the government side who did gymnastics in front of the Speaker's chair when closure was invoked in the debate on the Constitution. He missed the whole point of that occasion. Why were there gymnastics? There were gymnastics because those who participated in them were denied their rights, as members of this House, to speak on what is probably the most important issue for Canadians since confederation.

Now, again, I am being limited. I have many things to say. Instead of the customary 40 minutes, I have 10. I wonder—and I ask hon. members opposite to wonder—whether we are about to see the day when free speech is eliminated entirely from this House. Will we see the day when members just mail in their speeches or deliver them to the *Hansard* office to have them printed? It is a sad reflection on parliamentary democracy when a government hides—and I say "hides"—behind closure to avoid the spotlight of opposition examination and criticism. And this government has a majority.

I came to Ottawa to act as an extension of my constituents, which I believe is the democratic way. I did not come here to be a trained seal, as mentioned by the author of the book, "The Backbencher". I did not come to sit idly by and watch an autocratic leader of the Grit party turn this nation into a presidential-type republic because of an idea of a constitution made in his name. The seat I occupy is the most prized possession I could ever have. I sit in what I believe to be the highest court of this land, and unless that is changed by what I call the three Ts, that is the way it should remain. Those three Ts are the "trauma of the Trudeau treatise", or more specifically, the changing of our Constitution.

This chamber should be the embodiment of free speech. It should be the epitome of all those basic rights we have come to hold so sacred in this great country of ours. I personally will