

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wenman: In his press conference yesterday the Prime Minister hinted at the use of closure to limit debate on further stages of this proposal or motion which will be returned to the House. Can the Deputy Prime Minister assure this House that the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada will not, during the forthcoming procedures, invoke closure again? In fact, closure should not be invoked until the parliamentary reform suggested by his colleague is completed. Can he give us the assurance that all members will have the right to speak and that closure will not be invoked in further stages?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows as well as I do that the rule invoked yesterday is a part of the procedure of the House of Commons.

Mr. Knowles: Brought in by the Tories in 1913.

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has properly reminded us that the closure rule was brought in by the Conservative party.

Mr. Crombie: Not for the constitution.

Mr. MacEachen: I remember also that Mr. Diefenbaker, before he became prime minister, stated that he would abolish the closure rule, but during his period as prime minister he forgot all about it.

Mr. Clark: He never used it.

Mr. MacEachen: He left the closure rule on the books, and when the present House leader for the Conservative party brought in his paper on parliamentary change, to my recollection he did not include any indication of abolishing closure.

EXPRESSION OF VIEWS OF MEMBERS BEFORE JOINT COMMITTEE

Mr. Chris Speyer (Cambridge): Madam Speaker, my question is addressed to the President of the Privy Council. In view of the fact that the parliamentary committee which is to be established will consist of a relatively small number of members, probably five or six from our party and two from the New Democratic Party, and in light of last night's closure when 200 members were denied the right to speak about the fundamental arrangements which govern this country, would the minister please advise this House as to how these members are to make their views known to the committee so that the committee will have the advantage of knowing those views when reporting to this House? In particular, is any consideration being given whereby members have to ask to be witnesses before a committee of Parliament?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, those are questions which could be easily answered by the parliamentary leader of my hon. colleague. However, I am pleased to remind him that, with the assistance

of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre I suggested to his party to sit longer hours when there would be no Liberal speakers and when we would have only Progressive Conservative speakers to participate in the debate, and that his own caucus rejected that offer.

We mentioned earlier through the Deputy Prime Minister that we were prepared during the third stage, once the committee has reported to the House, to discuss an extension of the debate hours and also an extension of the days for the debate on that matter. So we are prepared to negotiate all those questions, and to give more time to all hon. members who want to participate but we want the opposition to prove its good faith by accepting at least the reasonable offers we made them.

[*English*]

Mr. Speyer: Madam Speaker, the conduct of the government with respect to this debate has entrenched bitterness, it has not entrenched rights.

My supplementary question is to the same minister, and it pertains to the constitution, which is the public social contract which underpins the terms on which Canadians live together. Does the minister not believe that this basic arrangement, which keeps people living together in a state hopefully of harmony, deserves a maximum amount of scrutiny, certainly more than the Bank Act or any other bill which comes before the House? Why have we not been given an opportunity to debate fully the constitution of our country?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pinard: Madam Speaker, may I remind the hon. member that it was his own leader who urged us not to deal with this very important question but rather with economic matters when Parliament resumed? We thought that this institution was capable of working on more than one important matter at a time. We also thought this institution was capable of showing the Canadian public that, through its committees, it could tackle concurrently constitutional, economic and energy issues.

So if some members of the opposition want to show the Canadian people it is possible to paralyse Parliament, they may succeed temporarily but I can guarantee that over the long term common sense will prevail and the public will realize that Parliament can function, can face the realities of the eighties, and also that we have the power and the capacity to cope with important issues such as the constitution, the economy, energy and all others to which he referred. All that is required for the House to function really well and for each member to enjoy complete freedom of expression is a little co-operation and good faith.