

Government Orders

I can only assume that the government really did not like to have specialized committees. They really did not like to have committees of the House getting to be too knowledgeable about various policy matters so that they could serve as a counterweight to the bureaucracy or to the decrees that come out of the Privy Council Office.

It is also interesting to speculate that the government could no longer find the members required to staff these committees. Indeed, that is the distinct impression that one gets today. With this government at, as I said in my remarks, an historic low in the opinion polls, the Conservative members really feel they have to spend more time back home attending to political organization rather than doing what they were supposed to do, which is to participate in the work of what the McGrath committee referred to as the central democratic institution.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to participate in this debate, but some of the remarks I make may not make everyone on all sides of the House happy.

I had an intervention the other day when the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, who is certainly one of the more active and conscientious members of the House and has certainly done a lot on procedure, started to look around the House and casually mention that there was no one around when the fundamental rule changes of 1969 came down the pike.

I happened to be here when the then House leader from the Liberal side, Mr. Macdonald, made the present government House leader seem like a Sunday School teacher at a Baptist picnic in terms of his very firm and determined approach to force through fundamental rule changes. One that I am going to concentrate on is the one that I wish the opposition had really got together on, instead of running the clock as we are running, although I am not suggesting motives because there have been some very good speeches here. This is the type of thing that should entertain members because it is our fundamental lifeblood and the bread and butter of the rules that make this place work.

I certainly subscribe to the comments from the opposition that on another day, in another way, this government has again done what it could have left undone by

doing properly what it has done improperly by having rule changes vented in a committee and having a debate in a very intense and detailed way within a committee.

I know all the history here about the procedures and the consultations between House Leaders and the different people. They were trying to work out a program. That was fine as far as it went, but whatever they came up with should have been referred to a committee with a broader group of members to vet the proposals of House Leaders and all the staff who work with House leaders and then bring it before the House. If the debate went on and on and on, then the government would be in a better position to do what it is likely it will have to do here. There will be a little howl of protest or a loud howl of protest of using closure to force through rules, but the fact of the matter is, back in 1969, after, as the member for Kingston and the Islands quite correctly pointed out, there was closure. I think it was in the summer, July I think. I remember being around here and having pep rallies in the different corridors and behind the curtains just to keep the thing going.

There was fire in the opposition then against those fundamental rule changes. After 12 days, the government of the day brought in closure and we lived with all the apprehension that the opposition of the day, and I was one of them, said would happen to the state of Parliament. There was the rape of Parliament then and somehow the rape seemed to get over and Parliament stumbled along in its form until we came to the next main cycle of reform which was the McGrath reform, which we all know about and some of us participated in some of those committees. That brought in very fundamental rule changes that I do believe helped this institution. It was pointed out by other members that it certainly changed the whole rule book in terms of committees. Having been a chairman of one of the better committees and I think one of the more active, conscientious and constructive of the committees, the transport committee, I can say that with the new rules changes in the McGrath report there was the power and still is the power for committees to initiate procedures and initiate studies. They do not have to wait to get an order from the House. They were hamstrung and hand tied with every procedure the committees used to have to do before, until the McGrath report.