

Procedure and Organization

the greatest respect to those government supporters who serve on the present Committee on Procedure and Organization, we have tried to get the widest agreement from hon. members who espouse the various political doctrines prevalent in this country. We have tried to accommodate all shades of opinion existing within our political spectrum. If this government had followed such a precept in this instance it would not be in the trouble in which it now finds itself.

I wish to refer to one or two other points that have come to my mind. It might not be amiss, when speaking of our obligations, to read remarks attributed to Edmund Burke in 1774. He said many important things on that occasion, and particularly apt is the following statement:

—government and legislation are matters of reason and judgment, and not of inclination; and what sort of reason is that, in which the determination preceded the discussion;—

It is because the government intends to predetermine parliament's program in advance of that program being deliberated in this assembly that Burke's words uttered almost 200 years ago apply clearly to this debate. Is I see the issue, it is that we are a deliberative assembly and the government should not be surprised that members of parliament need time to examine matters coming before parliament and to muster the public opinion of Canada. Any legislation not supported by widespread and well informed public opinion is apt to become bad law from the standpoint of the public's acceptance of that law. That law may entail good draftmanship; that is, the law may be well drafted and the statute may be very neat and tidy. The law, nevertheless, will be bad.

Over the years many people have wondered what are the obligations of hon. members under the parliamentary system. I suppose one could say that we play a part as representatives. In a minor sense we are indeed representatives; but that is not our primary obligation. Our second obligation is to take up what one might term an educative role. We are here not only as representatives of our people in parliament; we are here also, for good or ill, as educators. If the departments of government wish members of the house to fulfil their obligations to their constituents in full, they will have to give members the opportunity to exercise the educative part of their duties. Only in the narrowest sense are we representatives. In a much broader sense we are agents of all the country, and we

[Mr. Fairweather.]

therefore are under the obligation when considering government measures to exercise whatever native judgment we have. I am very serious about this. These three rules are inherent in membership in parliament. This is why I deplore this illiberal and arrogant challenge to a 700 year old institution which many, many times has done things for the betterment of the citizens of the country. Far more times has it been a positive aspect of our lives than it has been a negative aspect.

• (8:20 p.m.)

The people from the party I have the honour to serve who were on that Procedure and Organization Committee felt we had an obligation, an obligation we were glad to try to exercise, to assist parliament to reform its procedures. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) have said, we have taken giant steps toward bringing up to date our system of government and our rules and procedures.

The minister should be more frank. The order paper has dozens of items to the credit of the government to some extent, but also to the credit of the total institution of which we are a part. Whether the minister likes to continue his game of numbers, the 12's, 15's, 22's and 72's, we too have been sent here to exercise a constitutional role. This role is recognized by the jurisprudence, the conventions and the rules that have been adopted. This is not a threat, but I hope that this debate that is trying to turn an illiberal aspect of the government's policy toward a more sensitive and co-operative understanding of the fundamental issue which is involved here will challenge this illiberality until the government comes to its senses.

Mr. T. S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I think we now have under debate the motion of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair), the Chairman of the Procedure and Organization Committee because of the government house leader's attempt this afternoon to make a virtue out of necessity. I feel that the clear presentation that was made here last night to Your Honour to the effect that the government was asking the house to reverse a decision which it had already taken may have influenced the decision the house leader has taken. At least he may have felt inclined to believe, as I did, that the argument was clear and lucid enough to make an impression on the mind of