

*Procedure and Organization*

agree, by and large been reasonable, constructive and loyal. I hope this debate will not too severely detract from that fact, for that acknowledged truth belies any possible merit that Standing Order 75c might have possessed.

Standing Order 75c is an amazing proposal. It would seem to be almost a postscript for a dubious and chaotic assembly of fanatics. This resolution—perhaps I should say this fetish of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and/or the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald)—is in essence an usurpation of the independence of the House of Commons. It is an idea so unparalleled and significant as to be justified in its imposition upon a deliberative body only as a certificate of immaturity. For this parliament such certification I hardly think is proper and correct.

I think we as parliamentarians have been responsive and strong in an ongoing society. The ancient role of our parliament as the forum for, and safeguard of, our citizenry has been tempered and modified by accepting the increasing and complex obligations of a democratic and twentieth century statesman. We in this country have shared a desire for an opposition that is constructive, not an opposition that is alienated. Therefore, we have been positive in our approach to the business in this session.

I do not think there is anyone in this assembly who could question the reasonableness, the responsibility and the good faith of the leader of any of the opposition parties. Together with our countrymen we felt the exhilaration of our centennial year. We feel a mature concern toward the increasing spoliation of Canada's environment, the shame of persistent regional and vertical inequality, and the embarrassment of a confused and ambiguous policy toward the rest of the world. My colleagues in the opposition parties are in politics not, as some would believe, to stop things from being done, but to get things done. Throughout the first session of the twenty eighth parliament we have conducted ourselves in accordance with that sentiment.

Although Canadians are a generous and patient people, their problems are becoming more complex and entrenched. Therefore, all of us are concerned that the House of Commons become more immediate, or business-like if you wish, in executing its affairs and in its applications to the national interest. Thus we all agreed that parliamentary reform was vital.

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The historic rights of parliament are not absolute in form and have, with our support, been significantly tempered and modified in order to make this house more expeditious in its despatch of public business. This circumstance is a matter of record that defies contradiction. It is also an achievement in which we of the opposition take pride.

Clearly we of the opposition parties supported the vast majority of the proposed changes which were implemented on January 1 last. Our representatives on the all-party committee on procedural reform suggested many of the proposals and, indeed, helped to draft them. Further, we agreed to cut in half the number of days available for supply. We moved to refer the Biafran issue and the postal bill to parliamentary committees, thus saving the house several days of time in order to expedite further government measures.

Let us agree that the attitude of goodwill on our part has helped make this a uniquely positive and efficient parliament. This fact is pretty generally acknowledged. To the present proposals before the house I suspect most of us are not hostile per se. I support proposed standing order 75A and 75B, knowing that in supporting them I waive important privileges that I have as a member of Parliament. They also imply certain perils, particularly for the members of the Official Opposition.

Considering all this, and remembering that the reforms now undertaken make available an additional 50 to 55 days per session for government business, which amounts to 10 to 11 parliamentary weeks, and this at the cost of opposition time, I think our flexibility and goodwill have been clearly demonstrated in no uncertain terms.

We did not agree to make these reforms because we were naïve or childish in our attitude. I think that our reasoning has been practical. Although the vitality of the opposition in democratic parliaments since the birth of industry and the formalization of political parties has seriously waned, in this session alone we have allowed our slice of the time and our traditional privileges to be diminished; there is no question of that. We have concluded that the opposition has had to make this sacrifice in order to revitalise parliament as a whole. The House of Commons has to meet the challenge of society more competently and in a more immediate manner.

• (8:50 p.m.)

If our society is to be vital our parliament must be open, and to me, the central issue is