

*Extension of Sittings*

He went on to say:

"In every single case, as Laurier said on one occasion, where closure has been imposed, the opposition has been justified."

On page 11061, Mr. Nielsen went on to say:

"There is something else I will vote against when the time comes to do so, and that is the imposition of closure in the House of Commons. I will vote against the gagging and throttling of parliamentary debate, because that is what is happening."

Mr. Diefenbaker in the same debate, a wonderful, wonderful fellow, went on to say:

"—any flag brought in by closure cannot but fly over a divided nation and a discredited Government."

He was talking about our flag, of course, and we know that he was wrong on that issue. He said further:

"The Prime Minister says that an opposition has no right to prevent a decision. Taken literally that might be true, but in actual practice one of the major features of our parliamentary system is that oppositions have a responsibility to prevent wrong decisions."

Those are the words not of Liberals. Those are the words of Conservative Members of great credibility, leaders of their own Party. Indeed, Mr. Nielsen was the Deputy Prime Minister, as I recall, before his resignation in January, 1987.

I think the record should show that during the years he was here—and I believe he was also the Government House Leader from 1984 to 1987—closure was never imposed in this House. He obviously believed what he said, and I am sure he was speaking for his Party when he spoke. What happened after he left in January? In June 1987, closure was invoked to cut off the debate on capital punishment. In June, 1988, just this past summer, on a motion similar to the one before the House today, closure was invoked to ram that suspension of the rules through as well.

In other words, the suspension of the rules and the use of closure to do it is becoming a bit of a habit. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, it is a bad habit and one the Government ought to correct at once.

I would like to turn to the question of why we are facing this particular problem today. The Deputy Government House Leader has pointed out quite accurately that there was extensive debate on this issue during the course of the last Parliament. He has given us statistics to show how many days and hours the debate raged, and that is fine. There are something over 100 new Members in this Parliament—and I am subject to correction on my figures—who have never had an opportunity to discuss this issue in this House or in committee. Surely we have a right to proceed with that kind of discussion. Surely the discussion ought not to be forced upon us by sitting through the Christmas holidays well into the night, which is the proposal the Government has put before us.

Surely the debate ought to proceed in a normal parliamentary fashion where the matter is brought forward and referred to committee for study. This committee ought to be permitted to travel the country to get the views of Canadians on this issue, and then to come back and give the matter serious deliberation, to vote on the proposals for amendment, and to have third reading debate.

• (1730)

If the Government knew this all along, and it negotiated the deal, why did it call the election so late in November that there were only eight or nine sitting days of Parliament left before the normal Christmas break?

In July, Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) made it clear that the Bill would not clear the Senate before an election was called. It is not as though it were a surprise to the Government that there would be a problem. In spite of that the Government sat here and introduced, beginning in June, virtually its entire legislative program. After three years of indolence it decided that since it had to go to the people within a matter of months it had better do something and pass some legislation. It introduced a whole series of major Bills, starting in May and June of this year and including tax reform, child care, broadcasting and, of course, free trade. When it found it was having trouble getting some of this legislation through, it changed the rules as it is trying to do today in order to make Parliament accommodate itself to the wishes of the Government.

It got some of its legislation through but things stalled again. We went to the people finally in November after, in the view of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) at least, the polls had changed. He is the one who told us that he did not govern by polls but governed by the great democratic tradition and his great thought process on when it would be best to let the people make a decision.

If he had not been governing by polls, I suggest that normal rational consideration of the parliamentary timetable would have taken him to the people long before November 21. He would have been there in October, and we would have had several months in which to debate this issue in Parliament and to give this major Bill the consideration it deserves. Hon. Members know how thick the Bill is. As I recall, the Hon. Minister for International Trade (Mr. Crosbie) claimed he could not tear it up because it was so thick. We are expected to pass this Bill before the end of next week. It has only just been introduced this week.