

Procedure and Organization

This matter first came before the house last December. I thought at that time that the government showed wisdom in accepting the will of this house. But when it was inferred immediately after a decision had been made that the opposition had walked into a trap, I began to lose respect for this government. Up until that time I had thought their proposals were honourable ones. I had thought they were willing to accept the will of the house with regard to proposals presented to the House of Commons. Instead, I became very suspicious, and the measure before the house today proves that my suspicions were well founded.

● (5:40 p.m.)

I cannot, and I will not, accept the implication behind 75c. This is why, as a member of parliament representing the citizens of a riding in Ontario, I support wholeheartedly the amendment moved to delete the proposed rule 75c and to send the report back to the committee. As a member of Parliament, a man who took on the obligation to represent to the best of his ability a large number of citizens of this country, I cannot accept the fact that I shall not be allowed to speak in this house; I cannot accept a situation in which my propositions will not be endorsed by a committee; I cannot accept that the Parliament of Canada must deteriorate because a few individuals in high places so desire.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in this debate some two hours and sixteen minutes earlier than I had expected. I was hoping the hon. member for Kent-Essex (Mr. Danforth) would continue until six o'clock. He owes me a supper for making me get up before I was ready, though I hope this will not be too obvious to the house in the time remaining before six o'clock.

I am another of those who did not take part in the debate on the rule changes last December. However, I listened to almost everything that was said during that debate, and I carefully read the rest. I was impressed by the arguments put forward from both sides of the house, though I did not agree with those advanced by speakers from the government side. I am sure all hon. members felt greatly relieved that the government was wise enough in the end to withdraw its proposed rule 16A. I thought that would be the end of the matter. In fact, I was convinced it was the end as far as a rule along the lines of 16A was concerned.

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The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) indicated at that time, as my hon. friend and desk-mate, the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Harding) has reminded us, that the opposition was trapped. This caused me to believe that the government had decided against bringing in the equivalent of such a rule, certainly not in the present session and probably not during the lifetime of this parliament.

In any case, if a government felt the need for a rule of this kind it could be expected to produce overwhelming evidence to show it was completely justified. As sincerely and seriously as I can, I ask all hon. members who support the government: why do you need this change? What evidence do you have as to the need of such a rule as this? Why do you feel this rule is a proper one for a government to use? Several hon. members have pointed out that the government has failed to provide any evidence of obstruction or failure to co-operate. There has been no evidence that the opposition has deliberately or otherwise delayed the passage of legislation, or engaged in filibusters.

Speaking of filibustering, I hope that following the remarks of my hon. friend from Kootenay West, some hon. member on the government side will give us a definition of a filibustering from his point of view. I think my hon. friend did an excellent job of exposing the remark made by the Prime Minister last Friday. If, in fact, the government's definition of a filibuster is a 12-hour debate, I am all the more convinced that rule 75c has to be opposed all summer and fall if necessary. If this is their definition of a filibuster we can easily see what is in store for us should 75c be passed.

The degree of co-operation forthcoming from opposition parties in this session has been immeasurably greater than in any previous parliament in our history. There is good reason for this. There are more than 100 new members in this house and all of us, as new members, regardless of party, had been feeling parliament was too slow and that its actions were sometimes irrelevant. All of us hoped we could play a part in improving parliament in terms of the speed with which it handles business as well as in terms of the relevancy of its debates.

Since legislation so far has not been unduly delayed or obstructed, the question arises: why does the government feel it must have this rule? There is plenty of evidence to show that opposition parties have co-operated.