

Procedure and Organization

agree to a time limitation on second and third readings, the important report stage or the committee of the whole stage, in the case of a bill that does not get debated at the report stage but only at the committee of the whole stage, should not be subject to any time limitation imposed unilaterally by the government.

I want to make it clear that this morning when we met I indicated that in spite of the strong stand we had taken across the board against 75c, and in spite of all the things we have said against time limitation under 75c at any stage, in the interest of expediting the work of parliament and of gearing our rules to the realities of the present debating process, we were prepared to accept limitation on second and third readings, but we asked that there be no unilateral limitation on the debate at the committee of the whole stage or at the report stage.

● (5:30 p.m.)

It is that proposition, which I submit stands up and is in keeping with a realistic philosophy of our legislative process, that the President of the Privy Council, the government house leader, has rejected. We submit that this rejection should not have taken place. The President of the Privy Council, said in his remarks a few minutes ago that in his view there was no value to the continuation of this debate. I think he said: The continuation of this debate would not be a useful exercise.

I admit that there are times when debate gets out of hand and takes too long; but when a government simply says that a debate on a matter as important as the rules of parliament is not a useful exercise, it is admitting that it does not know what parliament is all about.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Parliament is not just a place where we make speeches, where enough time is allowed for us to speak and get on the record. If we were doing this, we would follow the advice of the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees) and just put our speeches on the record in printed form. The whole theory of parliament is that the debate be carried on, and out of debate something is achieved; that the cut and thrust of debate is real and purposeful. We have had instances of that in this session. I submit that because of debate the official languages bill is a better bill than it otherwise would have been. I submit that

because of debate the omnibus Criminal Code bill is a better bill than it otherwise would have been.

I could name instances by the dozen where in the past legislation has been improved because of debate. But this government says: Debate is not necessary. We will let these boys, elected to parliament at a cost of \$18,000 a year, sit here and make speeches now and then, but we do not intend that the debating process shall be one that results in the making of decisions. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this attitude illustrates a complete failure to recognize the purpose of parliament and the importance of parliamentary debate. There will be other occasions on which to raise points with regard to what debate is all about and what our rules are. I shall indicate in a moment the heading under which I may do it.

I regret that the government house leader has stood in his place and said that the continuation of debate on the rules of parliament is not a useful exercise. There is nothing more important to us, and nothing that is a more useful exercise. The government house leader says he will use the old 1913 closure rule and bring the debate to a conclusion at one o'clock Thursday morning, even though in the process some of the changes he has put forward are not accepted and some of the things we have agreed upon are sent down the drain.

I submit that this is a shameful way of proceeding. It is not a good day for parliament. The very real tragedy is that it need not have happened at all, because we have demonstrated in six months of parliamentary practice that we can make the House of Commons an effective chamber for the practising of participatory democracy. However, Mr. Speaker, this government does not want that. The government wants to be the master of the house. It has no awareness of the fact that we all come here as equals, with equal right to freedom of speech, that we have the right to freedom of speech unless we voluntarily give it up. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, this is a sad day for parliament.

The only other thing I want to say is that in my view the effort to put through the third report of the standing committee, which as everyone knows did not have the support of any member of the opposition, is contrary to the rules, traditions and practices of this House of Commons. There is a Standing Order that has something to say about this matter. I should like to give notice now that