

Procedure and Organization

some of the many urgent problems presently facing Canadians.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to have an opportunity to take part in one of the great and important debates which occasionally arise in this house. In my humble opinion the debate which is going on now is the most important one in which we have engaged in the present session of parliament. We are debating the real essence of parliamentary procedure, the very institution of democracy. This is why members on this side of the house have made up their minds to debate the subject fully and do their best to persuade the people of Canada that a rule of the type now proposed should never be written into the Standing Orders of this house.

I should like to examine for a minute or two several of the points raised by previous speakers. The hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) said that a year ago the present administration was elected to govern Canada. No one disputes this. No one disputes the right of a majority party to bring in legislation and get that legislation through parliament. But then the hon. member made another statement. He said that the job placed on the shoulders of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) today required that a change in procedure involving 75c be made.

I ask the hon. member for Bruce, as I have asked other hon. members, to name one piece of legislation which has been held up in this chamber, or which could not have been processed prior to the adjournment date on which we had agreed, namely, June 27? No member of this house can rise and say we have held up government legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

● (4:40 p.m.)

Mr. Harding: Yet the government is determined to bring in rule changes which will gag not only opposition members but members on the government side as well. We do not change the rules, Mr. Speaker, because we are looking for some immediate gain. That is not the way we ought to operate in parliament. We bring in rule changes because they will enable hon. members of this house to process bills democratically and, possibly, quickly. But we do not need these proposed changes. Nothing that has happened in the past few years indicates that we need rule changes as drastic as these.

It concerns me to think that a number of freshman members, they are scattered throughout all parties but predominate in the Liberal party, should demand that there be a gag which will be effective in cutting off debate on some of the most important pieces of legislation that could come before this house. Surely the hon. member for Bruce was speaking with tongue in cheek when he said a few moments ago that four days debating time is ample for the Canadian people to learn what is happening here. How foolish and unthinking hon. members are when they make statements like that. I appeal to hon. members of the house to send these rule changes back to committee. There are 12 men on the standing committee—let us call them reasonable men—who can examine these changes again. Let them wrestle with the problem and bring it back to the house later on. The opposition is as anxious as the government to see Canada well governed. We want good legislation and good government and we are not here to obstruct good legislation. All of us are sent here to do a job, but we do not need the guillotine that is contained in rule 75c to help us do our job.

I wish to refer to something the Prime Minister said in this house last Friday. He said that this debate on the rules change is a stupid filibuster. I have great respect for the Prime Minister, as we all ought to have. The Prime Minister especially should give guidance and leadership at all times to the people of Canada. If anyone is to act like a statesman it ought to be the Prime Minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Harding: It was with a sense of shock that I heard him describe this debate as a stupid filibuster. I want members on the government side to pay attention. For how long have we been discussing these rule changes? It may seem a long time, because most of us had hoped to go home on June 27. Actually, the amendment before us was introduced last Tuesday. Yet on Friday morning, after three days of debate, the Prime Minister told the Canadian nation that this is a stupid filibuster. I have looked carefully at the record, and I think my figures are accurate. Why did the Prime Minister of this nation say, after we had had three days of debate, that this is a stupid filibuster? We know why you want proposed rule 75c. The government is going to guillotine every major piece of legislation coming before this house. Let us see what has happened since last Monday.