

Government Orders

great, but, as I pointed out earlier, if it does not serve Parliament, it is wrong.

What about some rule changes that would assist Parliament? There are many of those currently being discussed. They have not made their way on to the Order Paper.

I want to conclude by saying that the absence of consensus here is a serious mistake by government members, if they proceed without it. A good rule should sell itself in this House because it subscribes to logic and common sense. If it does not, it should not be passed without consensus.

Those are my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Whittaker (Okanagan—Similkameen—Meritt): Mr. Speaker, prior to being elected to this place in 1988 I, through the course of my lifetime, had followed Canadian politics and Canadian history to a extent. Through the course of my readings I read biographies of John A. Macdonald, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Tommy Douglas, Mackenzie King, to name some of them. Through the course of each one of these biographies I came to look on this place, the House of Commons, as a place where the elected members could come and present arguments of their constituents, arguments of groups they were interested in, and in fact their own arguments, before the House of Commons.

I had the impression, perhaps wrongly, that these remarks were important. They were part of our history. Often we look back to speeches of various people within the House of Commons and we hear quoted past remarks of our great politicians.

These politicians have moulded what we have today in Canada, what we as Canadians are proud of in being Canadians.

• (1240)

It has changed the way this country has operated, with the effect of its social programs and its social safety net that is unlike anything else in North America and certainly second to none, I would suggest, in the world.

This was part of the parliamentary process, the process of debate, the cut and thrust. I agree that as times change rules and regulations must change. In law it is the growing tree analogy: as the tree grows so must the branches tend to reach out and encompass or take in the changes of changing society.

The changes that should be brought in are changes, particularly in a parliamentary process, that assist the vast majority of people in Canada to be heard in Parliament, to have their input put before the House of Commons. In looking through these books of history I saw the job of a parliamentarian, the job of an elected member of Parliament: to listen, to sift out and to bring back to Parliament the views and ideas of his or her constituents and to be able to present those to the governing party, if you were in opposition; to your cabinet, if you were a backbench member of the governing party; or, as a cabinet minister, to your cabinet colleagues and to your caucus.

What I have seen since I have been here has shattered some of those illusions I had. What I have seen since I came to this place in 1988 was not free flowing debate, a free flowing exchange of ideas, a free flowing exchange of constituents' ideas and the ability of constituents to have their say through their elected member of Parliament. What I have seen is what has happened here again today: a constant cutting off of the flow of debate by the rules that were set up to streamline the system somewhat, rules that were set up to ensure that legislation ultimately and eventually did get passed.

In the case before Parliament today in the Standing Orders, I believe this is the fourth day of debate on a very important matter not only to parliamentarians, but to all people of Canada.

As I recall, from 1913 through to the election of November 1988 closure was used 21 times in total over those 75 years of Parliament. Since I have been in Parliament, counting today closure has been used 14 times in just 2.5 years. In one case, as I recall, closure was even used in anticipation on an agricultural bill that the opposition might want to debate further. That was a case where although the opposition would have liked to have seen some expansion of the legislation, neither of the two major opposition parties was against the legislation in principle. In fact they were going to put up only a couple of speakers and then let the matter go to a vote.

The government in its arrogance simply ignored discussions with the opposition and invoked closure. The matter was passed on a voice vote without the necessity, but Parliament was not meant to have these matters pushed through or rammed through without proper discussion, with proper airing or without the adequate ability of the 26.5 million Canadians being given the opportunity to look these bills over, give them some