

*Procedure and Organization*

It is amazing to consider what happens when you give people power and set a precedent in this respect. Twenty-four years later the Liberal party, under Mr. St. Laurent, quoted the precedent that Mr. Bennett had set. This was done in respect of a bill only 3 or 4 clauses of which, out of several, if I am correct in my recollection, had been examined. I have forgotten the exact number of clauses in the bill. In any event, the Liberal government brought in closure at that time. There was no excuse for imposing closure in respect of all these bills because there had not been prolonged debate. It may be said there was probably prolonged debate in respect of three bills, only but I do not believe one could claim there was an abuse of the right of parliament to debate important issues.

A government may believe it is right in saying, "We will stop this nonsense", but human frailty being what it is, its judgment may be wrong. The heat of parliamentary debate can lead one to make faulty judgments. Our fear is that if the government is given that power, they will use it.

The last time closure was used by the government of Mr. St. Laurent was 1956. Mr. Harris, the minister of finance at that time, in a radio address about a week later said that closure was brought in only if, first, the government had a timetable it wanted to keep—he was not concerned about the rest of parliament—and, second, if the government wanted to cut off prolonged debate.

There are in the house many young, capable members. Some of them have not been here very long and have not the experience of other hon. members. I hope they will not fall for the reasons given by the government for imposing closure, because the backbenchers are the ones who will suffer. These decisions are made by the members on the front benches, but the backbenchers will suffer. As the leader of the New Democratic party pointed out so ably every time the rules have been amended it has had the effect of cramping the opportunity of backbenchers to speak.

This has been proven over the years. When our rules have been changed, the ability of backbenchers to adequately represent their constituencies has been impaired. The leader of the New Democratic party also pointed out in his able fashion that backbenchers will never have the opportunity to speak if this closure rule is passed. The leaders of the various parties will speak on legislation, and that will be it. I ask, Mr. Speaker: If this is

to be the situation, why are backbenchers brought here? Why not let the executive run the country? Why be burdened with the great expense involved in running parliament? Is this what the Prime Minister has in mind, namely, allowing the executive to run the country? These are questions we have to ask ourselves. They are important questions.

If past governments were able, in retrospect, to reconsider the imposition of closure, I am sure they would not have used it. This is the seriousness of the situation. The Liberals say they were wrong in using it in 1956. I remember Jack Pickersgill. Don't think he was not a clever fellow. I have heard the Four Horsemen, Mr. Chevrier, Mr. Pickersgill, Mr. Martin and Mr. Pearson, day after day in the question period speak for as long as they were allowed. At that time the question period ran over an hour on many occasions. They were talking about the price of eggs, butter, and so on, and we had a daily diet on the question of unemployment. They even had their own Bureau of statistics. They brought newspaper clippings into the chamber and read them; then they asked, "What does the minister say about that?" They read openly from pieces of paper and asked questions based on them.

There is no doubt that Mr. Pickersgill was clever. He got the transport portfolio and then fixed up a job for himself which was to his liking. You cannot say a man like that is not clever; if anybody does, there is something wrong with his thinking. Some of the ministers across the way were here at that time. Mr. Pickersgill said there was something wrong with the senses of any government that would dare to bring in closure; no government would impose it in the future. One can only conclude that this government has not done its homework; it has not looked at history. One should always go back to history upon which to base ground rules; then you should go ahead and build on those ground rules. We in the house have been handed a great heritage. We have copied the Mother of Parliaments. Westminster is the Mother of Parliaments wherever democracy rules in the world. We have been handed this heritage un sullied, and we must protect it. It was handed to us to protect and preserve. I wonder how many of us realize this. I am not happy about some of the things the government has done. To give it the power of closure in this way would be putting another axe in its hands.