

practice in this very debate—that it will not be just a case of attrition, or the use of closure. I hope the government will be responsive to the arguments put forward. I am delighted to hear that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself intends to take part in the debate tonight, and I hope he will demonstrate that he has listened to the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition, and indeed that he has listened to mine. I thank him for the courtesy he has extended to each of us in staying through these speeches this afternoon and this evening. My point is that if this proposed change in the rules makes for a series of one day debates it will have destroyed the whole character of parliament as a forum where matters are thrashed out in the cut and thrust of discussion.

There is another point. No government which is in power for four years, however large its majority, has the right to change the basic nature of this institution. If I may put it in the simple terms I used half an hour ago when the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) and I shared the spotlight on a television program, the present government has been put in charge of the store by the people of Canada for four years. But they do not own the store; they do not have the right to change its basic nature.

This house is basically a debating institution. The government is still the executive; the government still proposes the legislation. But we have the right, by debate, to decide whether or not that legislation should be put into effect. I urge the government to realize that it does not have the right to change rules which are fundamental. Most of the revisions of the kind we have dealt with in our reports are not, but this proposition concerns something basic, namely, the right of the majority to say to backbenchers on either side: You will get your right to represent your constituents only when the government house leader thinks there is time for you in the schedule he dictates.

● (8:10 p.m.)

So, Mr. Speaker, I go along with the proposition that there is an obligation on the part of all of us to organize and plan our time. That means that there are responsibilities on the opposition side as well as on the government side. But I deny absolutely the right of the government, just because it is a majority government, just because it says it has a mandate, to deny to members on either side the right to exercise the thing that is basic to all who come here, namely the right of free

speech on behalf of the constituents whom they represent.

Let my time run out before I get to the suggestions which at six o'clock I said I would make, perhaps I had better come to them now. I indicated earlier that we of the New Democratic party will support the amendment that was proposed this afternoon by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), but I hope that he will not feel that two or three suggestions I am going to make are contrary to the spirit of that amendment. I hope that amendment will be accepted by the government so that this matter can go back to the special committee for further consideration.

Now I am going to suggest one or two other ways that this problem might be solved. I do not move them as a subamendment. I do not put them forward in any firm way but as points of negotiation. If we can be reasonable and responsible about this, I wish to say there are three main things that are wrong with the proposed standing order 16-A—if we are going to have it at all.

The first is the notion that one man out of four is a quorum. Surely nobody can defend that. The second is that one man, although overruled by three, can still put forward his motion as though it were the report of the committee. I know that the standing order is worded to imply that he can do one of two things. He can either bring in a report of the committee, or a motion after there has been consultation with the committee; but, in spirit, what that part of the new rule permits is for one man to be overruled by three and yet come ahead with his recommendation.

The other thing wrong with the rule is the permission contained in it for the government house leader, in one motion, to make any arrangement he wishes covering the time to be allocated to or the disposition of any item or items of the business of the house or any of its standing committees. Mr. Speaker, if I may borrow the word used by the Leader of the Opposition, that is the most horrendous part of it all.

The government house leader tells us it is the government's plan to get to the point where at the start of a session all its legislation will appear on the order paper right away. That did not happen this session, although we were given a list of proposed items. But look at what could happen. The government could put on the order paper 15, 25 or 50 items of legislation and on the first Thursday of the first full week's sitting the