

the prolonged flag debate. I do not recall whether he made that statement in this house or somewhere else. As it happened I was not a member of parliament at that time. This occurred during the parliament of 1963-65 and I was defeated in the election of 1963. Like very many people outside parliament, I felt that that debate was a waste of time. I was irritated that members of a certain party were responsible for dragging out that debate. I still feel that perhaps the debate was somewhat too long, but I say very seriously to the members of the cabinet who are here that often in retrospect I have thought it might well be that the length and acerbity of that debate served a purpose for Canada.

Having travelled across this country and having met many people who objected to the abandoning of our former flag, it seems to me it might well be that the bloodletting which took place on the floor of this house and the arguments which took place here as well as the length of time the debate took, which gave the people of all regions an opportunity to write and send wires to their members, might be the reason, historically speaking, that Canadians accepted the flag in a manner and in a way in which they might not otherwise have done. I suggest seriously that perhaps that debate should have taken half the time it did, but I am confident that when there is a major issue of that sort the expression of the people's feeling about it in the house and the opportunity given to the people of Canada to express their feelings through their members is an example of the way in which democracy works. It is the way in which the consent is obtained of the people who are concerned about such a matter and it is the way in which to avoid having constant and continuous feeling of bitterness and frustration on the part of those who have been defeated.

● (4:40 p.m.)

Democracy works by consent only when it gives those who oppose what is being done the fullest opportunity to express themselves, so that they do not live with the frustration of having had something shoved down their throats without having had the right and freedom to think about it and to speak on it. I claim no originality for that statement. Surely this is an elementary fact of the democratic process. Nowhere should that fact be reflected more carefully and clearly than in the parliament of Canada. This is what the proposed standing order 16A would endanger.

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Motion for Concurrence in Report

The Prime Minister last night made a speech in which for the most part he talked about the need for change. He does not need to persuade us about that. We have in our party, and I think members of all other parties as well, Liberal, Conservative—I am not sure I have heard the Creditistes say this—advocated the need for changes in the rules.

[*Translation*]

I do not often have the opportunity to go to the province of Quebec—

[*English*]

I have heard Conservatives, Liberals and members of my party talk about the need to reform parliament. We accept that proposition. But when we think of reforming parliament we have to accommodate two opposing principles. Both principles are important, but I believe one is more important than the other. We should not move in the direction which the government indicates. The two principles we have to accommodate and reconcile are the principle of efficiency and that of adequate freedom of speech in this parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: I agree with the Prime Minister—and we in my party said this a long time ago—that if parliament is so silly and if members of the opposition are so silly as to prolong a debate on one bill beyond a reasonable time, what they are doing is preventing the possibility of debate on another bill which may be equally important. They are cutting their own throats; they are doing a disservice to Canada, whichever way you like to put it.

Therefore efficiency is an important principle. But efficiency for what, is the question we have to ask. Efficiency for what purpose, is what we have to decide. Is it efficiency merely in terms of the government getting its measures passed with the least possible difficulty, or is it efficiency in terms of conducting the work of parliament so that there takes place the fullest debate possible under the circumstances, an expression of all views, a confrontation of differing and conflicting philosophies, a consideration of legislation with as much objectivity as any politician can muster? That is the kind of efficiency I am talking about, not the kind of efficiency that is represented in proposed standing order 16A.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: We should think of the efficiency of parliament in those terms, not of the