

Procedure and Organization

days. We have already spent six days on this debate. By the end of this week we will have reached nine days of debate as well. Some 18 days of the time of this house will have been spent debating the rules, all because of the persistence of this government in respect of this one particular matter.

It seems to me, after listening to the speeches by government members and the arguments presented by the government, that much of the motivation is based on occurrences in the last parliament. They are not up to date, and they are not dealing with the situation before parliament now. It seems to me this government is attempting to give the impression that it is moving forward into the future with its eyes firmly fixed on the past.

There are all sorts of images and comparisons which come to one's mind in trying to figure out what this government is trying to do. One image that comes to my mind is that this government somehow gives the impression of a new car hurtling down the road in which there is a beautiful blond sitting alongside the driver who has neither of his hands on the steering wheel. Some of the members might suggest that in this modern technological and technocratic age that car was being operated by remote control. It seems to me there might be some validity in that impression on the basis of the attendance both of cabinet ministers and government members in this house during the question period and during other debates in this house.

• (9:00 p.m.)

Long before I became a member of parliament I was convinced that the rules of parliament needed a thorough overhaul and an updating. In my opinion, parliament needs a safeguard to protect freedom of debate and to recognize the proper, useful and essential role of debate, while at the same time recognizing the needs of the nation and the rule and work to be performed by parliament. Some hon. members will know that prior to my election last year I was an unsuccessful candidate in several federal elections. My first run as a candidate was in the general election of 1957. I have to confess that on several occasions during the 11 years between 1957 and 1968 I was secretly relieved that I had not been elected. There were occasions when members of the house were called upon to work intolerable, inhuman hours for more than a year at a stretch. There were situations devoid of commonsense and reason. I should not need to recall to members of the house that on several occasions in recent years there was a

[Mr. Burton.]

general feeling in Canada that parliament was no longer relevant and no longer capable of coping with the needs of Canadian people. There was a feeling that parliament was slowly strangling itself, as well as the nation, as a result of its failure to restructure its operations.

My feelings on this subject were reinforced by one small incident last September. On that occasion, shortly after my arrival in Ottawa, my four year old son commented, on seeing the parliament buildings for the first time, "It's a castle". This made me think: Surely this is the way many young people must feel about parliament. One of the things I looked forward to at the commencement of the session was the prospect that the rules of parliament would be revised to enable the house to cope with an ever-expanding workload occasioned by the increasing scope and scale of public activity and concern. I was mindful of the fact that members of my own party, in particular the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), had long pressed for an adequate revision of the rules. Their concern was based on a recognition of both the desirability and the inevitability of expansion in the scope of governmental activity and concern.

When the session commenced last September I thought there was real reason for hope. Members and spokesmen for the government had indicated that they wanted to improve the rules. There seemed to be a disposition on all sides of the house to update the rules and make them more meaningful and relevant to today's needs. I thought there was real hope that progress would be made, while at the same time safeguarding the basic rights of parliament.

I should have known better than to think you could trust Liberals to have a controlling voice in making such changes. One reason I should have known better was that my father once sat as a member of this house, as well as a member of the Saskatchewan legislature, and had plenty of experience with Liberals. He learned through experience, sometimes bitter experience, to never trust a Liberal.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Wise old Joe.

Mr. Burton: I am well aware of the background and experience that gave rise to this conclusion and thoroughly justified him in that belief. If any hon. members would like to hear some stories in this regard, I would be glad to tell them either now or on another