

Procedure and Organization

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): This is your program you are setting out?

Mr. Stanfield: A great sense of humour.

An hon. Member: A great sense of stupidity.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) is showing just how much regard he has for parliamentary tradition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Paproski: Shame.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): He couldn't care less about parliamentary tradition. He sits where he does because he happened to back the right man at a political convention and because he is an obedient and supine hatchet-man.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): He is being pretty funny so I hope he will continue.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I am almost through, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): You have been through for some time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Has the hon. member unanimous consent to continue?

An hon. Member: By all means.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I do not intend to waste any more time on the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) because that is not the important question. The important thing is that whoever may sit in the seats of government—it may be the Liberal party today, it may be another party four years from now—ought to remember that the day may come when it will be on the other side of the house and that it has a duty to ensure that members of the house will always have the inalienable right to be heard and to express the views of the people they represent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): That is what the present debate is all about—the right to be heard. I believe in the democratic process. I have always said throughout my adult life that if ideas can be argued and debated in the marketplace of ideas the truth will ultimately prevail.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I have great faith in the common sense of the ordinary man and woman. I believe that if they are given the opportunity to listen to both sides, in most cases they will make the right decision. But they can only make that decision if adequate opportunity is given for discussion, if there is a proper dialogue. I refer not to a dialogue in this chamber alone but to a dialogue that is carried on across the country as a result of the debates in this chamber. That is what makes this chamber important; not the fact that we argue here back and forth but that we express ideas which are reproduced in the press and propagated on radio and television. Out of this comes public discussion in various communities, and there is a feedback to members of parliament. Little by little a consensus is developed. That is what democracy is all about.

• (4:30 p.m.)

If discussion is curtailed and we reach the point where one day is allotted to the report stage, for instance, and the house is facing five or ten amendments, I ask private members who is going to do the talking? The talking will be done by the minister in charge of the bill, the Leader of the Opposition, the leaders of the other parties, and then time will just about be gone. When will the backbenchers be given a chance to say anything? They will have no chance at all. Rule 75c will choke off private members and in most instances will deny them the opportunity to express the views of their constituents.

I say that this situation will be very dangerous. The very essence of democracy is the right to speak and to be heard, to argue and to debate. Whether we agree among ourselves is not important; what is important is that we all have the right to express our views. Voltaire said this a long time ago but it is still true. Writing to a man with whom he violently disagreed, he said: "I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it". That is what we are fighting for here—the right for people to speak. We may not agree with what they say, but their right to express themselves is an inalienable part of our democracy.

Mr. J. A. Jerome (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, my growing experience in this house continues to be very rewarding, but perhaps the remarks of the last speaker, the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Doug-