

Procedure and Organization

believe we should conduct ourselves on a businesslike basis. I have watched with uneasiness the continual infringement of the rights of the ordinary citizens of Canada by this parliament to a degree that makes me fear for the future of this country. I have seen bills passed by the government majority in this house giving rights to government appointees that are greater than those given to members of the R.C.M.P. I have seen government appointed individuals protected by statutes to the degree that if anyone challenged these officials they would be liable to fines and a penalty of up to two years in jail. Their power is such that if a Canadian citizen disagrees with a particular decision his only recourse is an appeal to a government appointed arbitrator. Canadian citizens have to appeal a government decision to an appointee of the government. What I particularly object to is the provision that the decision of the arbitrator in question is final, that there is no appeal to, or review by, any other court. In other words, Canadians are losing their right to appeal to the courts of the land.

Under the provisions of another statute, which I shall not identify, an appointed official of the government is given what I as a layman feel are rights that are greater than those given to a Supreme Court judge. Under this statute a deputy minister can issue subpoenas, require oaths to be taken, demand that witnesses give evidence, and accept testimony that would be inadmissible in any court of the land. This power goes beyond the courts and to me is an infringement on my rights as a Canadian, in the same way as this proposed rule is an infringement on my rights as a member of parliament. This is why I cannot and will not accept the approach taken by this government.

I respect the hon. members of this house. I learned long ago that wisdom does not lie within any one particular political party in this house but that all political parties have men of great knowledge and wisdom. Together they form a great parliament. I feel the time will never come when only one party will present the best legislation. Certainly, this cannot be achieved by denying contributions from one half of the members of the house who collectively have wisdom, knowledge and experience. Such a suggestion does not make sense.

As one who has enjoyed the harmony and co-operation that has been evident in the house, I am now beginning to realize what is meant when members declare that, if they are compelled by sheer weight of numbers to

[Mr. Danforth.]

accept this particular measure, we must work to rule. This was not a threat; it was said in desperation, after they had pleaded with the government to be reasonable in their approach. This was said after it had been pointed out that 75A and 75B are the tools that have been used to make progress thus far in this parliament. These provisions have made it possible for us to deal with hundreds of issues.

Having listened to hon. members declaring they cannot accept 75c, that they will not accept 75c; that they will find ways of circumventing it if it is adopted, all I can say is: God bless these men for being men, and thank God for Canada that they are in this house. Only in this way can this parliament survive.

We must have the right to speak in this house. It is not good enough for members on the government side to tell me that I have ample opportunity to speak in committee and to discuss bills.

Mr. Deakon: We cannot.

Mr. Danforth: The hon. member is right; they cannot tell me this. Having sat in committees for years and seen the committee system in operation under different governments, I would say that the present committees are hamstrung to a degree unprecedented in parliamentary history. Having said that, I will also admit that there are some committees sitting today for which I have the greatest respect, because the membership of those committees have divested themselves of partisanship and are trying to work for the good of the country. We need more men with this approach.

Other committees have but one thing in mind, that is the promotion of government measures irrespective of their value or their weaknesses. This is why I cannot accept the present committee structure. Committees are told that they have the right to summon and hear witnesses, to ask for papers and documents and to travel from place to place, and this sounds good and is well meant. But I have sat in committee meetings dealing with government legislation at which the minister in charge has stated we could summon only government officials. When this happens the committee defeats itself. There are men of learning and experience other than government officials who can improve legislation put before this house. Either we are going to have a democracy or we are going to have a dictatorship. I say this country is not ready for parliamentary dictatorship.