

S.O. 75c

the government's most recent attempt to stifle debate in Parliament.

I have only been a member of Parliament for a short while. It will be two years in May. I experienced the invocation of 75C in the Thirty-first Parliament and I have experienced it three times in this Parliament. Before I came here, I was of the false impression, it now appears, that closure was something that was only brought in on very historic occasions, and even then was regarded as a negative move on the part of the government.

When I was just five years old, the Liberals of the day, in 1956, brought in closure on the pipeline debate. I was one of those young Canadians who grew up with the perception that closure was something that was used only in those kinds of political events that were perceived to be crises by the government of the day. Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have seen closure used time and time again.

I want to take this opportunity to make a few brief remarks about what the debate on closure ought to bring to mind for us. First, we have to remember, particularly as closure is being brought in on the borrowing authority, that the original purpose of Parliament was to put control of the public purse in the hands of the people for the first time.

We have here a particularly poignant example of the government returning to itself the divine right of kings. It seeks to limit the possibility of debate in Parliament on something so fundamental as the borrowing authority for some \$14 billion when we in our party, for example, have only had the opportunity of putting forward three, perhaps four, speakers. There is something wrong when there is so little opportunity to sort out the kinds of priorities the expenditure of that kind of money represents.

We ought to look at the larger picture of what has happened to parliamentary debate. I am not sure how long it has been the case, but I want to say to other members who may feel the way I do that one of the problems with debate, period, is not just that it is closed off, but that at times it seems so meaningless. What we have here is not real debate. We have a sort of pro forma exercise in which everyone gets up and does a little part of the charade. A charade is going on now with members chatting and doing their own thing. I am going through the exercise expected of me; after me, others will go through the exercises expected of them. We will then have the vote and everything will be fine.

The problem is, this is no longer a debate. And this is not a chamber for the exchange of ideas. No one is open to persuasion. Members know what they believe when they stand up and they know what they believe when they sit down. No one is listening to anyone else.

The opposition does not have the power of persuasion because there is no real debate going on here. The only power the opposition has is to delay government action. I suggest this is why so much bad feeling is aroused when the government moves against the power of the opposition to delay legislation. In fact, Parliament has so little power—and the opposition in

turn has even less—that this power to delay is cherished by the opposition and ought to be cherished by the opposition until such time as we can restore some integrity to debate in this House.

● (2010)

One of the problems with debate in this House is that it reflects the sense in which all of us are prisoners of the big lie; nobody really expects anybody to tell the truth any more. From the time we turn on our television sets or radios in the morning until we turn them off after the news at night, we expect to be bombarded with all kinds of falsehoods and half-truths, and we carry that attitude toward communication into this House. I wish to use this opportunity to call, in so far as it is possible to call for something like this, for the restoration of the integrity of communication so that we can have some kind of real debate here. This will have to happen on a much wider scale than just this Parliament, but we can begin by restoring some integrity to debate here and not sliding down the slippery slope toward a lack of genuine communication. We do not want the kind of politics that relies on advertising, on slogans, on the indifference and apathy of the Canadian people. We must get out there and let them know what is really going on. We are all guilty, in this respect, of cheapening the worth of political debate.

The government's move to close off debate is part of that syndrome; it is a sort of "Catch 22" situation. I am sure that one of the reasons closure does not seem to be such a tragedy to some members is that the debate is so worthless in the first place. And it is worthless because the government and others have had the attitude that it is simply something we must get through. It is a vicious circle. I ask the government to break out of the role it has been playing. It has more power than the opposition, obviously. I ask the government, in its leadership role, not just in its technical role, to give more power to the opposition and to committees. In turn, this would bring more power to debate. Perhaps we could actually turn this House into the institution I thought it was, perhaps naively, when I decided to run for office. If that were so, we could have some genuine debate about the future of the country and many of the matters which are troubling us at this time.

This move on the part of the government to close off debate is the kind of cynical manoeuvre which destroys rather than promotes the possibility of what I am talking about.

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the remarks made by my friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie). The hon. member has touched one of the very real problems we face in this House, the fact that business has to be done, debate has to be held and such debate must be relevant. That is one of the problems to which my hon. friend referred and of which I am aware from listening to debates on a number of issues.

My friends on both sides of the House will agree that debate has strayed far from the topic which was under discussion in