

Procedure and Organization

involves the very preservation of responsible parliamentary government as we have known it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Once the Chair recognizes the right of a majority to change the rules of the house without the support or approval of a single member of the opposition, and to do so by the use of closure, then we are on the slippery slope which will enable any government to destroy parliament simply by changing the rules of this house, using a simple majority controlled by itself alone. Therefore I say that a motion like this, which is put forward to change the rules without having the support of a single member of the opposition, violates the privileges and rules of this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

● (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Stanfield: This is not a mere technical argument. We must consider it in the light of the authoritarian tendencies displayed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and some hon. members of the government. It was a very unpleasant experience for me to sit here and watch hon. members opposite when the government house leader announced that closure would be imposed. I do not intend to use words like "fascist" and "nazi"—they are not proper and I do not intend to use them.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: Watching the glee on the faces of hon. members opposite, and the obvious enjoyment they derived from the use of what I call arbitrary power, was an unsettling experience for me, and I am filled with foreboding about what may lie ahead for us.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I do not accuse my hon. friends opposite of anything ugly, but I say it is apparent they are prepared to exercise their power to achieve any objective they wish to achieve. That has been demonstrated here. I ask, how far away are we from the kind of Gaullist government under which this house would have no real power, under which we would have government by television interview, with an election every four or six years? If this motion is put tonight, how far away will we be from that sort of government?

An hon. Member: There might even be no elections.

Mr. Stanfield: That is one question we must consider earnestly. There is an additional reason for saying this motion ought not to be put and that it violates the privileges of the house. It is admitted on all sides that this is a bad rule. I believe there are few, even on the other side of the house—and this includes even the Prime Minister's most loyal followers—who will defend the proposed rule in its present form. The government house leader has even stated that changes to it are necessary and desirable. There is no question about that, Mr. Speaker. The great majority of hon. members opposite admit quite freely that the rule is unnecessarily harsh and unnecessarily restrictive.

The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) agreed that it should go back to the committee; the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Deachman) moved a sub-amendment saying it should go back to the committee. In all corners of the house it is admitted to be an unsatisfactory rule, and it is attributed to hon. gentlemen opposite that they realize this. They realize it is unsatisfactory. Yet they are asking the house to adopt it on the basis that at some future time it can be made satisfactory. Mr. Speaker, for the government to ask this house to adopt a rule which it admits to be bad and in need of correction is an imposition on and violation of the privileges of this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Thirdly, sir, the rule is ambiguous. I argue, and I think I am right, that as it reads rule 75c cannot be invoked if all opposition representatives agree under rule 75B. I have been told hon. members opposite dispute this, that they will argue, if the point should arise, that this is not so and that they will try to convince you that rule 75c can be used if the representative of the government is not party to an agreement under 75B.

Ordinarily Your Honour leaves it to the judgment of the house to determine whether any piece of legislation or matter coming before it is clear or ambiguous. Ordinarily you would leave the whole question to the house. But, Sir, now we are talking about the rules of the house; we are talking about the rules under which this house will operate, and I say it is a violation of the privileges of this house for the government to move the adoption of rules which are admitted to be