

*Procedure and Organization*

house. As a new member and a party backbencher I become more and more concerned each day I sit here with the repeated attempts by this government to camouflage democracy. As a matter of fact, there is blatant evidence of disregard for democracy. I wonder how I am supposed to believe the words of the Fathers of Confederation that the fundamental importance of parliament comes from its representative character. It can speak as no other body in a democracy can, for the people.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The House of Commons is supposed to be the great democratic agency of the government of Canada, the great inquest of the nation, the organized medium through which the public will find expression and exercise its ultimate political power. Proposed rule 75c, permitting a time limit on parliamentary debate, strikes at the very base of our democratic system, namely, that there must be full and open discussion of issues in parliament. It means, instead, an end of free speech and free debate.

Just one year ago the Liberal cry was participatory democracy and the need for public involvement and dialogue. So what kind of camouflage is this? The administrative record of the Liberal régime for the past year makes a mockery of any belief that this policy was ever intended by them to be operative. The Prime Minister has sought to downgrade parliament's role, not only in the rule changes intended to upgrade committees but in the other rule changes already implemented.

Just look at what is happening under the government's closed system of constitutional review. What does it do to confirm government's concern for public involvement? Neither the people of Canada nor their representatives have had a voice in the constitutional review process. With the introduction of rule 75c, the government has once again shown its contempt for our form of parliamentary democracy. Rule 75c is merely another indication of the arrogant elitism of the régime of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau); it is nothing more than an attempt to establish once and for all the dictatorship of the establishment over the House of Commons. The present grab for power under rule 75c has the effect of emasculating parliament. Ultimately, the people of Canada will be the main victim of the rule if it is passed. The proposed rule permitting a time limit on parliamentary debate strikes at the very base of our democratic system, namely, that there must be full

and open discussion of issues in parliament. It means an end of free speech and free debate.

Four parties are represented in the house, and since they reflect differing points of view each deserves to be heard. Moreover, parliament is a national forum and spokesmen from the different regions of the country must be given the opportunity to be heard. It must be remembered that regionalism is an integrating force if accommodated to a certain extent, but if allowed to run wild it quickly becomes a potent divisive force. Rule 75c cannot help but stifle regional voices.

The critical function of parliament is to keep the executive in touch with public opinion. By giving guidance, encouragement, advice and support to the government as well as disparagement and criticism, parliament alerts the government to the opinions of the people of Canada. This presentation and interchange of views makes possible a more exact appreciation of the nature of popular response to government policies.

The companion function of parliament, and one which can scarcely be separated from the first, is to keep public opinion in touch with the problems of government. In this respect the House of Commons is much more than a mere mouthpiece repeating and advertising the views of constituents; it is also an educator and opinion-maker. Many questions are debated in the house on which voters have no certain convictions, or on which they may need further information and guidance. Discussion radiates from parliament in waves; arguments are transmitted, presented, simplified and perhaps distorted, but a common opinion develops and creates new waves which find their way back to parliament.

Rule 75c undermines the basic right of the opposition parties to debate legislation for an adequate time. "Adequate" in this connection means long enough not only to point out any mistakes or dangers in legislation but to make the country aware of them. Unless the opposition that faces an autocratically controlled majority can challenge the government in debates lasting long enough to alert the public to potentially harmful legislation, and to create an opinion throughout the country, parliament itself becomes meaningless and useless. If rule 75c is not defeated, democracy will be replaced by tyranny.

The present régime offers as justification for the acquisition of these tyrannical powers the need for efficiency in parliament. Once again we warn the government that we are not going to fall for this political soft-sell.