

Procedure and Organization

I should like to make one more reference to the situation in the United Kingdom. The position of the Speaker—and I am not speaking of personalities—is much stronger. He is appointed for life or until he wishes to retire. He may be a person who formally was associated with an opposition party. He appoints to the business committee men whom he knows to be objective and as non-partisan as possible. The business committee is responsible to the Speaker. The committee is composed of a chairman and members appointed by the Speaker. In that way, in the United Kingdom the Speaker has been given by parliament the undoubted power to act as referee, as it were, in contentious situations to a much greater degree than is the case here. This is an important matter. I wish to point out, for example, that not only does the Speaker have special powers but also, for instance, in relation to the closure rule when a member rises to propose a motion of closure the Speaker decides right there and then whether or not it is appropriate that the motion be put. If he does not think it is appropriate, because he believes the rights of minorities are being infringed, then he does not accept it at that time and allows the debate to proceed.

I should like to see Mr. Speaker here given some such powers by parliament so that he could be the adjudicator, the referee or umpire. In that way we could get on with rules which would be acceptable to everybody. Only in that way can we function adequately as a parliament. A great deal of talk has been heard about the guillotine rule in the British House of Commons. What the government is asking for here is not a guillotine. It is asking for a blunderbuss. Considering the government's refusal to divide the omnibus bill into various sections and allow a free vote on that, and considering the vast concessions made to the government in respect of changes in the rules, it is my belief the government has acted in a way which should lead us to think it cannot be trusted with a blunderbuss at this time, especially when it wishes to have it on the shelf so that it will be convenient for use when we reconvene in October.

• (5:40 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate but I should like to say at once that I am sorry about the present situation. I am sorry to

see that after hundreds of years, we still have to fight for our rights and our prerogatives.

While the Canadian people fought so hard and with such dedication, while our ancestors worked so hard to promote and protect the interests of the people, we are still faced with the same conditions.

This, Mr. Speaker, breaks our hearts and we are disappointed to see that this parliament, in 1969—in the 20th century, a century of science and progress—still has to waste time, to fight and to protest strongly in order to preserve its rights.

I think that these rights are dear to us, Mr. Speaker. They should be protected to the utmost because they are what is most precious, noble and great in a country where democracy has a right to exist and where everybody has a right to insist on his prerogatives. At present, this government wants to force upon us a real dictatorship. Now, if they were in the opposition, perhaps they would not say the same thing.

I have been here since 1962 when the Liberals were in the opposition. They were then taking part in the debates and wasting the time of the house. In those days, they were fighting vigorously to maintain their rights. They claimed that the government was interfering with their rights and prerogatives.

Indeed, the Liberals monopolized the time of the house to the extent where no rule could be adopted.

The situation has now changed. The opposition has accepted certain reforms. It has been quite reasonable; it has taken several steps in the right direction to improve the Standing Orders of the house. There is not one member of the opposition who is not in favour of making some improvements. There is not one of them who does not want progress and to do something for the people.

As for us, we have been forced to take certain steps to be recognized, to be heard. To represent the elite, and the people, the opposition has been forced to do that because the government has introduced impossible laws, laws that are unfair to the people.

When the government introduced the omnibus bill, to which 80 per cent of the people were opposed, we used every right and prerogative at our disposal in order that the rights of those who did not want it should be respected. The bill was adopted just the same. Unfair laws like that one will be used to hold up the business of the house.