

*Extension of Sittings*

I also want to compliment my new colleagues in the New Democratic Party who have spoken tonight. I watched many of them on television and sat with many of them in the House. I am incredibly impressed, and I am sure that their constituents must be proud of the work that they have done in choosing to send them here. That is why they are here and not their opponents. Congratulations, my friends.

I am here tonight to stand up in defence of parliamentary traditions, traditions that have been developed collectively in Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere over centuries. Those protections are designed to look after the rights of the minority as opposed to the rights of the majority. I wish to quote an individual who shared that concern in a debate some time ago which dealt with an issue similar to that of closure, which is what we are talking about tonight:

"Mr. Speaker, I participate in this debate with a degree of sadness and regret having regard to the fact that we have just had thrust upon this House one of the most repugnant and most destructive devices ever perpetrated on the democratic process.

I am deeply saddened, because the debate that has taken place in this Chamber for the last 24 hours interspersed over a couple of weeks or so is perhaps the most important historic debate I have ever witnessed in my 12 years as a Member of the House. It is with a great deal of regret that I see it cut off prematurely having regard to its importance and the fact that some Members who wanted to speak will not have that opportunity.

The government's action is the result of a move that is ruthless, arrogant and, I believe, cowardly. Parliament is now succumbing, as the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) has said, to the tyranny of the majority.

Who was that Member of the House who spoke so eloquently? Was it a member of the New Democratic Party? No, it was not. It was a member of the then Official Opposition, now the House Leader of the Government of Canada, the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski). That is what he said on October 23, 1980, as reported in *Commons Debates*. Some things come back to haunt people, and that is one of them.

In my experience as a parliamentarian, what we have seen over the past five days is extremely distasteful. It is extremely unfortunate for the democratic process. We have before us a Bill of major consequence. We have a fundamental disagreement in the House in terms of whether it is good or bad. That is what the House is for, to take a look at issues such as that, to debate, to argue, to propose, and in some cases to modify.

In the previous Parliament we were very successful in modifying government legislation to reflect more accurately the spirit of its intentions. We have to oppose other Bills because they are fundamental to what makes this country what it is today and we do not want to see that change happening. The future of our country is more important than attempting to rush through an important piece of legislation in time to be home for Christmas.

• (2320)

While it is true that this legislation has already been debated—and while I have not read through Bill C-2, I assume that it is identical, or almost identical, to its predecessor Bill—we have to remember what kind of debate it was. The debate held last summer was not a lengthy, reasoned debate. It, too, was crunched. At every stage of the process, closure was invoked. The Government was not prepared to have a full and open debate, not only on the principle of free trade, but on the nitty-gritty of the legislation.

The legislative committee charged with the detailed study of the Bill was not permitted to hold hearings outside Ottawa to enable it to hear from those in opposition or in favour of the Free Trade Agreement. It had no opportunity to travel to those parts of the country which would be negatively affected by such an agreement and hear from Canadians living in those areas. Conversely, it had no opportunity to travel to those parts of the country which would benefit from the Free Trade Agreement and to hear from the people living in those areas.

At that time we listened to a former Prime Minister of this country taking issue with the fact that the legislative committee then charged with considering the free trade legislation was not allowed to travel to various areas of the country to hear the views of Canadians on the important issue of free trade.

What has happened over the course of this past week, and continuing this evening, and which will culminate in a vote within the next couple of hours, is the tyranny of the majority, the power of the majority being used to thwart the views of not only the Members on this side of the House but the citizens we represent. We are the representatives of our constituents. Each and every one of us spent countless hours during the campaign knocking on doors and talking to people about this issue.