

Procedure and Organization

with reasonable and responsible people. If they come to the point where they are faced with obstruction and filibuster, then of course it is a different matter. They then have the right, if they want to, to use Standing Order 33, to use the power of closure, and let the public decide whether they are justified in using it.

• (4:20 p.m.)

What the government seems to forget is that we are answerable on both sides of the house to the public. If we on this side obstruct needlessly, if we waste time, if we facetiously prevent decisions from being reached, our constituents will deal with us. The voters will react against any party which conducts itself irresponsibly and the public will support a government bringing in closure if it finds it necessary to do so after a prolonged debate has taken place. But the public will not support the idea of imposing closure virtually in advance; the public will not support any government which makes rules so that a minister can introduce a measure and after speaking we would be allowed two hours of debate, then one day on the bill for the first stage, two hours and another day of debate on the second stage, one day on third reading and one day in committee—three days in all.

The *Ottawa Citizen*, which has always been very friendly to the Liberal party, carried an editorial on Wednesday, June 25 with the heading: "Hidden Closure. Proposed Rule Violates Rights." I shall not read the whole of the editorial, though it is an excellent one. I shall read the last two paragraphs:

A minority has more than a right to debate legislation. It has a right to rally public opinion to its side. Especially should it be able to exercise this right when examining legislation dealing with matters of conscience. Only when the minority has had a full opportunity to do this should debate be cut off.

Some form of closure is necessary if parliament is to do business but it should be applied after exhaustive debate, not before.

This is not what the government is proposing to do. We believe that 90 per cent of the business of the house could be allocated on the basis of orders as to time through 75A and that probably the rest could be dealt with through 75B. If there is one per cent which cannot be arranged through either 75A or 75B, the government always has the right after protracted debate to resort to Standing Order 33.

By ramming 75c through the house the government is doing violence to parliament

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

and is weakening the democratic process. I remind hon. members that when we demean parliament we demean ourselves. As Members of Parliament the only power we have is derived from the fact that we are Members of Parliament. We are here by virtue of the fact that the people in our constituencies sent us here. If we belittle this house, if we make it irrelevant, if we make it a mere rubberstamp for a dictatorial government, we make ourselves mere puppets and will be so judged by the people we represent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): If we are muzzled, if dissent cannot be expressed in this assembly, I warn the government that dissent will take to the streets. If democracy is to survive it must survive in this place of all places. If dissent cannot express itself in words it will inevitably express itself in violence. I remind supporters of the government, particularly the younger members who sit on the back benches, that rule 75c is a two-edged sword and that it can cut both ways. Governments come and governments go. I have seen five different prime ministers sit in that seat. I have seen scores of cabinet ministers come and go. Political fortune is a fickle goddess.

An hon. Member: Who knows better?

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): The hon. gentleman will learn it.

An hon. Member: The people will decide.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Yes. And may I point out to the hon. member that when they decide it is quite possible that many of those who sit opposite today will be sitting on this side of the house. Not all of them, of course. Some of them will not be back at all; they came in for one term on the coat tails of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). But there are some who will sit on this side of the house. I wonder what they will think then about rule 75c. What will they think, for instance, about a bill to rescind the Official Languages Act to be passed in three days of debate—one day on second reading, one on the report stage and one on third reading? What will they think of a bill to discontinue family allowances, to be passed by parliament in a total of four days? Or what about a resolution to amend the British North America Act to take away some of the privileges of French-speaking Canadians?