

House of Commons Procedures

bribes. That is what they think. I say to those backbenchers who are so eagerly lining up to pass legislation which will squelch forever the voice of the individual Members of this House: Be careful, because though you think you are going to run this country forever you will never get to the front benches short of the sudden death or extreme senility of those who are sitting there now. You will sit on the back benches as long as I will and perhaps longer. So do not be so anxious to keep in line with those people who ran this country prior to 1957 and whose statements indicate they have not changed their way of thinking since those days. And if, in your seal-like approbation of your front bench, you allow your conscience not to be disturbed, do not think for one second you will escape the consequences.

Specifically as to these rule changes—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Rhéaume:—speaking as the Member for the Northwest Territories now and in no other capacity, I have extreme worries. Any step taken by this Chamber to restrict the opportunity to speak on any topic poses an inherent threat, particularly to those of us who represent the far northern regions of our country. One need only consider the political organization of all parties in this House, particularly that of the two major parties which hold special caucus meetings for those Members who come from a given region, such as the Alberta caucus, the British Columbia caucus, the Ontario caucus, to realize that if you stand in this chamber speaking for either the Yukon or the Northwest Territories you are a voice of one. This is something that transcends party lines. Political parties, however, must necessarily focus their organization and enthusiasm on the Provinces of this country and they tend to overlook other areas.

• (9:30 p.m.)

But as the representative of the Northwest Territories, an area of Canada that only since 1962 has had a representative in this House of Commons, that to this day is not represented fully in Parliament because we do not have a representative in the Senate, and everyone knows the other place is an important part of Parliament—

Mr. Knowles: Order.

Mr. Rhéaume: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) calls "Order". He does not feel it is

[Mr. Rhéaume.]

necessary for the Northwest Territories or any other part of Canada to have a representative in the Senate. As usual he speaks with that unshakeable confidence that comes from the knowledge that his party will never form the Government of this country. This is what allows him to say these things. However, those of us who live in the far northern reaches are not trying to tear down everything in Canada all at once; we are merely trying to obtain representation. As a voice of one in this House I am not prepared to support a rule change which will restrict in any way, either as a result of party Whips or allotment of time, the right of the Member for the Northwest Territories, whoever he or she may be in future, to get up and fight for the people of the north. I say this because I am satisfied on the basis of my experience in this place that if the man or woman who comes from the far north does not make the case you southerners are not going to fall all over yourselves looking after us. I am not prepared to accept any change that may at some time in the future prevent the voice of those people who live in the far north of Canada being heard in this chamber.

I have never suggested for one second that the Government should automatically do what the Member for the Northwest Territories or the Member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) suggests it should do. But I can guarantee one thing, that as a result of the things that were brought forward last November 22 by the hon. Member for Yukon, when the Members from the far north raise matters the Cabinet sits up and takes notice if for no other reason than that they may have, like the musk-ox to gather around and protect one of their own frontbenchers who somehow or other has strayed from the path of what is right and good.

I am not willing to see an allocation of time that might be divided conveniently between spokesmen for various parts of this country at a time when those of us who live in the north, have no guarantee that our voice shall be heard on issues that affect us most. I know the answer to this is that we have in the House on the front bench the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Laing) and his Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. Turner), but I also know that if we look at what the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources is doing today we find that a man who does not know his way around the Canadian north is spending his time in Siberia attempting to find out how to