

Procedure and Organization

a great deal of whispering in the ears of his colleagues in the government as this debate progresses, and he may be able to help them understand what they are seeking to do to this institution, which I think all of us in our hearts cherish as a very important part of the fabric of Canadian life.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Forest (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, it is not new that the major and serious problem in this house is its incapacity or rather its inability to set up its program and foresee its business or its proceedings on a more realistic, more practical and more efficient basis, and also more in keeping with the increased volume and the complexity of present legislation, more in line with new needs and the present times.

When last December this house approved the vast majority of the recommendations of the committee on procedure and organization, we made a greater step forward than ever before to modernize our procedures, recognized by all as obsolete. Moreover, this question was raised many times, particularly during the last election campaign, and I think we might say that we received a formal mandate from the people, to go ahead with reforms in respect of our procedures.

• (9:00 p.m.)

All are now aware, I believe, in spite of certain apprehensions expressed during the debate, that the prestige of parliament has grown, that bills are examined more adequately and that estimates receive a more serious and profound study. We must also point out that the opposition has better opportunities of changing the legislation when expressing its point of view, particularly through the amendments it can propose in committee as well as in the house.

Naturally, there are still improvements to be made, particularly as regards the operations of the committees. Certain committees are overloaded with work and need, for instance, experts, additional personnel, more appropriate and more numerous locals, etc. Besides, the committee on procedure and organization has studied this problem and has made certain recommendations.

But we still have to complete the work so well begun and bring ourselves to the same level as the modern legislatures of the democratic world, which have, most of them, if not all, adopted rules to limit the debates that drag on without reason.

It is yet impossible to establish or to provide a legislative timetable during a session. The present one will be adjourned while there is still on the order paper or in abeyance, here, or in the other place, a whole series of important bills that could have been considered and passed.

It is impossible to allocate time for the passage of a bill at any stage, either in the house or in the committee. This session that was to adjourn on June 27 is still going on and the end is not in sight.

It seems obvious to me that our parliament must have, in order to meet this country's needs and to work efficiently, and in an orderly and constructive manner, a procedure that will enable it to impose a limit when no agreement has been reached and that we are faced with systematic obstruction on the part of a minority that endlessly repeats the same arguments solely for the purpose of delaying a decision, to upset the government's legislative program or, perhaps for political or party purposes.

Last December, no decision was reached, contrary to what has lately been stated in that regard. The only decision was to refer once again this important question to the same committee so that it could re-examine it in the light of the views expressed during the debate in December and taking into consideration the rules and practices applied at Westminster which is always considered as the model of all parliaments, especially of our own.

During the first debate and again now, those who wish to strengthen their hold on the proceedings in parliament and also their right to veto the opinion of the majority which, constitutionally and normally, must make the final decision, have suggested that we should rely on common sense and on the judgment of all hon. members or party representatives.

Mr. Speaker, experience has shown that this is neither practical or realistic, and I am sure that if all opposition members are reasonable—let us not forget that there are three opposition parties, and that a party cannot speak on behalf of another to guarantee an order given or deemed to be given with regard to expediting the business of the house—there will never be any danger that Standing Order 75c shall be applied because the government which would certainly not want to be accused of dictatorship and so forth will do its utmost to reach an understanding with the other parties and provide