

*Procedure and Organization*

was suggested by some very able and sincere parliamentarians yesterday.

This is a very important debate, but it has become a very painful one as well. Much of the reason for this stems from the fact that the person who should have brought most to this debate and raised its tone, who should have given it fine and noble emphasis, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself, was one of the chief of those who cast denigration upon it by suggesting that members battling for the rights of parliament were indulging in a "stupid filibuster".

Denigrating parliament is a serious matter. We as individual politicians are used to being the stereotyped butt end of jokes; that is part of the game. But when the institution of parliament itself is denigrated in the eyes of the public, and the leader of the institution from within joins in that denigration, then the situation is serious. Never in the history of this country have we had a Prime Minister who has led the ranks of those who would belittle this institution.

Sir John A. Macdonald, the father of this country, was a member of parliament at the age of 29 until his death at the age of 76. He loved parliament and sometimes played it like an organ. But he always recognized its importance and value. As Arthur Meighen said of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, parliament was the home of his intellect and he liked it. Sir Robert Borden from Nova Scotia, our second last Nova Scotian prime minister, found it a workshop. He worked hard and well. Arthur Meighen electrified and glorified its debates.

A former Prime Minister, the right hon. gentleman for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), was one of the great performers in parliamentary institutions. I may say that of all the criticisms that I have heard levelled against the right hon. gentleman, today was the first time I had heard him criticized for not imposing closure and for not limiting the rights of the minority.

Certainly this could have been done in the years after the election of 1958 when the Liberal opposition was decimated. Even the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was gone. The opposition consisted of hapless and hopeless remnants. The hon. member for Prince Albert led a triumphant group of 208 members. But never did he or his associates ever suggest that the smart thing to do would be to bring in some device whereby the opposition might be muzzled. I think this is to his eternal credit, not to his detriment.

I, much like my colleague for Calgary Centre (Mr. Harkness), do not pretend to be an expert on the rules. I leave this subject to those who are. I also agree with him that some of our most lengthy debates are those devoted to discussions about saving the time of parliament.

This debate is more than a discussion of the rules. It is not just a narrow discussion of a law, a regulation or a rule, but of the spirit behind it. This is what we are reflecting upon in this debate. There is more involved than the mere words of rule 75A, 75B and 75C. I think it is the essence of representative government that we are evaluating and appreciating at this time.

We all know, of course, that parliament should be efficient. While precedent and tradition are important to us, we do not necessarily weaken the institution when we change its rules or guidelines. There have been in recent years some real contributions toward achieving greater efficiency and I welcome them heartily. Over the years members have adopted many self-denying ordinances. We limited set debates such as the Throne Speech and budget. Time limits on speeches of individual members have been set. Then we reached the stage where we limited the question period, and I think that was a good step. I welcome these measures, but I think the committee would find it profitable to consider further improvements.

Although there has been a proper limitation of time in the question period, there has been an improper limitation of participation on the part of ministers. Therefore, I think we may have to take a look at the question period in a new perspective.

I also wonder whether consideration might be given to putting into our order paper some concrete and definite guidelines on the question period which would be more practical and contemporary than the provisions of citation 171 of Beauchesne. In fact, I wonder whether, under the existing restraints, we need consider other guidelines than those of relevancy, propriety and brevity to steer us through the question period.

I believe that Standing Order 40 has been a contributor to more meaningful debate in the house. On the other hand, perhaps further consideration should be given to Standing Order 26. Waste of time while waiting for votes has long been a pet beef of mine, and I would welcome improvement in this regard. We need constantly to improve our procedures and to revise our standing orders.