

Procedure and Organization

says that my interpretation is wrong. The most they can argue is that I am wrong and they are right. The most they can argue is that the Speaker would at some time in the future have to determine this question. We do not even know who the Speaker would be. I am not casting reflections on anybody, but we do not know who would be in the chair at the time the government put this up for decision. It is very clear, however, that the house should not be asked to consider ambiguous rules.

• (4:10 p.m.)

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The hon. member acknowledges that there is ambiguity, then?

Mr. Stanfield: I will argue that when the time comes. But I assume the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) will argue the other way. I assume he will argue that he can bypass 75B. I do not think members of this house should be asked to consider seriously a rule about which there will be serious argument as to what it means. I think it is an absurdity for the government to insist that we consider 75c in relation to 75B.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? If he feels it is absurd to consider it in its ambiguous state, would he be agreeable to considering the motion in my name, in which the ambiguity is not present?

Mr. Stanfield: No, Mr. Speaker, because the minister's motion was altogether improper. It involved trampling on the committee system, and he has withdrawn it in any event.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Stanfield: I am glad to see the government is listening to me now.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): On a point of order, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) should not mislead the house by saying that my motion was withdrawn. If he looks at page six of the order paper he will see that it still stands.

Mr. Stanfield: We should not be asked to consider adopting a rule which is ambiguous. I do not think anyone on the other side will argue that it is clearly what they say it means. It is clearly ambiguous. Clearly, it ought not to be proceeded with. Clearly, it is an affront to the house, and clearly it should be withdrawn. I emphasize that I do not

[Mr. Stanfield.]

accept 75c even on my interpretation, even putting aside those who say they agree with what the house leader said about its meaning. It would not be satisfactory on that basis. It would not be satisfactory on the basis that it would only be used when the representatives of the opposition parties could not agree among themselves as to allocation of time.

I cannot accept 75c because in the first place the government has not shown that anything of this kind is necessary. The failure has been in its own policy and in the development of its own policy. It has not been a failure of parliament. Second, the adoption of 75c would not help the government to get through a larger legislative program; it would simply enable the government to cut off debate from time to time. So I cannot accept it on either of those two counts. Furthermore, I repeat that the government is not to be trusted with any more authority, as has been very clearly demonstrated.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: In addition, I do not think this house should consider 75c or anything like it in any form without a more adequate provision relating to the time during which bills are before the house for consideration. It is absurd, in its present form, that any bill could be passed in ten days, for example. There will be many occasions on which the public would not have any idea of the implications of a bill in this context.

Second, I do not think it would be proper to consider anything like 75c even if someone could satisfy me—it has not been done so far and I do not think it can be done—that it would enable the government to get through more business, and that it is parliament which is holding up legislation rather than the government. There would have to be, for example some structural safeguards with regard to 75B concerning the kind of meetings which would take place, the kind of effort to reach agreement among representatives of the opposition with regard to the allocation of time, and so on. There would have to be minutes kept. The group would have to be presided over by someone a good deal more conciliatory than the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald), who is probably the last man in Canada likely to achieve agreement.

Rule 75B should be strengthened at this stage. This is what we should be doing now. We should be strengthening 75B so that it relates to a more formalized structure, so that the meeting is presided over by somebody