

*Procedure and Organization*

able to get it from someone more competent than the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. This was demonstrated by his speech.

The second thing he did was to say that we have no right to be making an appeal to you, Sir, with reference to the impropriety of seeking a change in the rules of the house by closure, and a change in the rules of the house unilaterally. This government is not only changing the rules of the house by closure but the minister now gets up and tells us that although Standing Order 51 is there we cannot use it because he has decided we ought not use it. The government is not only changing the written rules, it is now changing the rules as the debate goes on.

The minister knows perfectly well that this hocus-pocus about the opposition calling for the report of the Committee on Procedure and—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

● (5:40 p.m.)

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):**—and Organization is the sheerest of nonsense. All the opposition groups opposed both the motion and the report. They opposed the report in the committee, they opposed it when it came to the house, and they are still opposing the report as is shown by the fact that the government has been forced to use closure.

We on this side of the house are not seeking to embarrass Your Honour or to place you in an invidious position. We recognize that the basic principle of parliament is that the Speaker does not offer any opinion on the substance of legislation or of a motion; that the Speaker is the arbiter of the house in dealing with matters of procedure. If this were a closure motion dealing with a bill or a resolution, as was the case with the Canadian flag, of course the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. MacEachen) would be quite right: we ought not to make an appeal to Your Honour under those circumstances.

We on this side of the house contend that changing the rules of the house is in a totally different category. We contend that the rules of the house are not the sole property of the government; that the rules of the house are the property of the entire House of Commons with Your Honour presiding.

**An hon. Member:** We are the majority.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** One hon. member on the other side

has said they belong to the majority. That is exactly what we are objecting to.

**Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys):** Those are the members with six months' experience.

**Mr. Comeau:** That interjection was the maiden speech of the hon. member.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** In any democratic, deliberative assembly the minority, sent there by the people of the country, has only two kinds of protection. One is the protection provided by the rules of the house, rules that set forth clearly and succinctly a member's rights, prerogatives and privileges. That is the only thing that protects a minority against an arrogant majority drunk with power. That is the only protection a minority has against a majority that seeks to impose its will. If the majority can change the rules of the house unilaterally, the rights of the minority are automatically eroded.

In this instance there has been no consensus. In this instance the rule which is before the house was brought in, supported solely by the government members on the Committee on Procedure and Organization. In the House of Commons that report has been supported solely by government members, and it is now to be railroaded through, if the government has its way, entirely by the support of government members.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands):** If a majority can at any time use its weight of numbers in the House of Commons to change the rules, how long will the rights of the minority in parliament continue to exist? If the government unilaterally can change the rules, as it is seeking to do now, what can it do next session and the session after that?

The Minister of Manpower and Immigration said that all these fears were inventions from the mind of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). If the government can change the rules to limit debate to one day on any stage of a bill, is there anything to prevent it next session limiting the time to two hours, or limiting debate to one speaker for each party in the house? Is there any end to what can happen to the rights of private members and the rights of minorities in this house? I think we have a right to appeal to Your Honour, as we shall