

Procedure and Organization

Parliament is not a computer; it is not a classroom, an assembly line or a sausage factory. It is a forum for debate. Debate in parliament must be carried on for as long as is necessary. It must be carried on until the opposition has had a chance to bring to the attention of the press and other media, which in turn will communicate with the people, the weakness of any piece of legislation being considered.

There must be time for newspapers and periodicals to comment. Our people read what is written in our newspapers and magazines about legislation under consideration, and "get the message". Then they write letters to the newspapers, to the Prime Minister or the government minister concerned, and the government "gets the message" that the people do not think the legislation being considered is good and that it should not be passed. This process takes considerable time.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I want to mention three examples to show why we must have time for debate. The first of these, Mr. Speaker, was the transport bill presented to parliament two years ago. At that time the opposition thought a great deal was wrong with the bill and that many of its clauses should be changed. As we know, debate lasted several weeks. During that time about 100 amendments were proposed, many being accepted by the government. Of course, we had a good minister of transport then; Mr. Pickersgill was a man who appreciated the rights of hon. members. After listening to their arguments he agreed that certain parts of the bill should be changed, and the changes were made.

Mr. Bell: A great Canadian.

Mr. Hees: As a result, although debate on the bill was protracted, the legislation coming out of parliament was better than it would have been had there been no lengthy debate. If proposed rule 75c had been in force then it is possible that that debate could have lasted only four days, and we should have had a bad transport bill. Parliament could have done absolutely nothing to improve it.

My second example is the defence production bill of 1955. Hon. members who were here then will no doubt recall that Mr. C. D. Howe asked parliament to give him, under the defence production bill, powers in peacetime that the government had given him in wartime. Those powers would have made him a virtual dictator over Canadian industry in peacetime. The opposition said that no minister

[Mr. Hees.]

had the right to have powers in peacetime which he was given in wartime, and we fought, fought, and fought for many weeks. Mr. St. Laurent, a great prime minister, at last recognized that the legislation was bad and that no minister of any government had the right to have powers in peacetime that he had been given in wartime.

We said to the government, "If there is any emergency situation or any crisis, call parliament and we shall see that you get adequate powers to deal with the crisis right away." Of course Mr. Howe had tasted power in wartime and he wanted more of that same power. We said he could have it in an emergency, but he wanted it then and there. At last Mr. St. Laurent solved the problem by sending Mr. Howe away for a long fishing week end, giving the opposition a chance to propose amendments. That again shows how important is debate in this chamber.

My third example is the famous pipe line debate. Most of us supported the idea of the pipe line, but when a minister of the Crown, the same Mr. C. D. Howe, said he would not give the opposition information as to what part his friend, Clint Murchison, was to play in building the pipe line, we had to continue protracted debate. In the end Mr. Howe decided to implement closure, and we know what the result of that action was. It led to the defeat of the government eight months later.

I could cite many other examples but these three show how important it is for an opposition to have ample time to bring a case before the people. It needs time to do the job so that the people of the country can become aware, through the speeches of members, articles in the press, editorials and so on, of the importance of a matter. When the people of Canada know what legislation is all about and the government gets a feedback, legislation is amended. This process is good and necessary, and that is why we are going to fight proposed rule 75c right down the line.

I think we all wish to see the parliamentary process speeded up. I have made several suggestions as to how that process could be speeded, and I and others like me will make more suggestions in future. I have made personal recommendations, based on 19 years' experience in parliament, as to how we ought to reduce time spent on various stages of discussion.

We all want to make parliament more effective. Why does the government not try to hurry up parliamentary processes by adopting