

Procedure and Organization

submit, therefore, that in that light you should find that the attempt to change the rules in this way is contrary to all of our best traditions and contrary to the principles of collectivity and consent, and you should advise the house, before you put the question tonight, that the motion of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton is contrary to the provisions of Standing Order 51.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take some time to support the views put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I make no apology for taking a little time because I believe it is the most important question that we have had to face in this parliament since I first came here, and that we are likely to have to face for a very long time.

Standing Order 51 requires you, Mr. Speaker, to say whenever Your Honour is of the opinion that a motion offered to the house is contrary to the rules and privileges of parliament. The rules and privileges of parliament consist not only of the written rules, not only of the decisions of the Speaker from time to time, but also of the customs and usages of parliament referred to explicitly in the rules of the British house of 1867 in so far as applicable, to our own customs and traditions.

In view of the fact that closure is being imposed I suggest that it is essential that Your Honour interpret even more generously—or to put it in another way, more cautiously—the rules and privileges of the house. I suggest that in view of the fact that closure is being imposed it is Your Honour's duty to ensure that the rules and privileges of this house are not trampled upon in the process.

Certainly it is the tradition here that changes in the rules are brought about on a broad basis of agreement in all quarters of the house. This is a tradition of long standing and, as has been pointed out, it is the only effective way in which changes in the rules can be made. The house can operate only if the rules have a broad basis of support, but in addition to the functional aspect of rule changes it is certainly equally true that the customs and usages of this house require a broad basis of support. This has been violated in the manner in which the government party is proceeding at this time.

The use of closure to force through rule changes, which are opposed by every member of the opposition, is of course an aggravation,

and the use of this method of forcing through rules that do not carry the approval of a single member of the opposition is so completely foreign to the traditions of this house as to constitute a breach of privilege. If the rules can be changed in these circumstances, and if closure can be resorted to in order to implement these rule changes, and can be used so as to alter fundamentally the very nature and role of the House of Commons, then we are in a very sorry state indeed in so far as democracy and freedom are concerned.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: If Your Honour permits this motion to be put, particularly with the background of closure, then Your Honour will have established the precedent that the majority in this house can change the rules so as to permit, if it chooses, only the most nominal consideration of legislation by this house. Backed by closure the majority could put through changes in rules which would eliminate all stages of discussion except one, and, of course, at the same time require the house to vote prescribed amounts of money within a prescribed time.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Surely, Mr. Speaker, this is not the true concept of parliament. Surely, it is not the true concept of the privileges and rights of this house. I suggest there is a striking parallel between the struggle we are facing now and the old struggle of the House of Commons to resist the dictates of Stuart Kings—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield:—and the subsequent efforts of the Crown to control the House of Commons. It is true the government is not sending in armed forces to impose its will on the House of Commons. But clearly the government is telling the House of Commons what it must do. The purpose of this motion, enforced by closure, is obviously to reduce the powers and the privileges of the House of Commons in order that the government can in future so control the house as to ensure that it passes within a specified time all legislation listed by the government, and, of course, that it votes X number of dollars in a specified length of time.

I am not trying to involve you in the substance of this motion, Mr. Speaker, but I would point out that if the motion is put, particularly by means of closure, it becomes a precedent so ugly, so full of foreboding for the