

Procedure and Organization

more meaningful to the Canadian people. The wonder of it all is that previous governments moved so slowly to reform the rules. While our Commonwealth cousins have been initiating changes and reforms in all directions, our parliament has become more and more ineffective in the face of modern challenges. When a committee of this house visited Westminster and conferred with British leaders a while back, the U.K. government house leader, Richard Crossman, told Canadians bluntly that we have been living with 19th century rules of procedure.

Those very spiritual cousins of our friends to the left have been telling us that it has taken time but change has come. Many people resist change because they cannot abide it. They say, halt and stay awhile. Let us adopt a few tentative reforms. Some say we cannot and must not contemplate anything like 75c. Progress has been made during the past months, and there have been some major steps in spite of the failure of previous governments to initiate progressive and regular rule reforms.

What have we accomplished? Despite all their shakedown problems the standing committees have a new status in the house. After years of complaints by members that estimates were given too little time, our standing committees are being entrusted with detailed examination of the estimates, and they have been accorded a new role in the matter of examining public bills. For a government which the opposition alleges is hell-bent on the destruction of the parliamentary system it must mark a new departure from the standard plot of subversion to accord opposition parties so many days wherein they can bring forward policy issues in a series of motions that they can bring forward with notice and have debated.

The report stage of public bills now provides opportunities for members to direct attention to amendments and to stimulate debate in a way that has not been possible in the past. Is this another way of subverting democracy and crushing parliament? For a government which the opposition charges is against democracy, surely it was unwise for it to fulfil a long standing Tory promise to provide research budgets for all opposition parties in order that they might make a more helpful contribution to parliament?

This debate has continued long enough. Conversations should be resumed, and we are hopeful they will lead to the settlement of difficult differences.

[Mr. Perrault.]

An hon. Member: Don't believe it.

Mr. Perrault: There is no doubt whatsoever about the determination of the government to adopt 75c. If there is majority agreement to extend the time limits under 75c, or in respect of other modifications which would make it acceptable, I would not dissent or disagree with such a decision. No one in the house could reasonably dispute the fact that the government, after all other negotiations have failed, in the last extremity has the right to establish the limits of debate with the full and certain knowledge that if, in the mind of the public, the action is unfair it will be turned out of office and given time to contemplate its sins of omission and commission.

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, it seems strange to be locked in debate in mid-July in a session of parliament which has had 192 sitting days. It is stranger still when there was supposed to be a clear understanding that we would break off our deliberations and debates on June 27.

The recommendations of the committee on procedure concerning the virtues and values of the semester system—a word which I always thought was rather inappropriate—now seem strangely unreal. While I appreciate the beauties of our nation's capital, I would prefer to be amid them in the weeks after Labour day and prior to Dominion day. This is not only because I come from a part of the country where summer is a glorious season when warmth and winds are alike, kind and gentle, but I think there is something wrong when a parliament cannot so organize itself that its members and its staff are out of here in July and August.

This is wrong, but there is here a greater wrong being perpetrated. That is why we are debating, and that is why I join in this debate. That is why I have no idea how long we may be engaged in this important debate. This must be obvious after the performance of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) last night.

● (12:10 p.m.)

If the performance of the President of the Privy Council on television last night is indicative of the attitudes of hon. members opposite, then I must confess to great anxiety for the future as far as compromise and reasonable conciliation is concerned. His performance, his suggestions and their implications did no service to him or to this parliament. They were a total misrepresentation of what