

Motion for Concurrence in Report

of inquiry and the consequent capacity to arouse and inform public opinion, is the single most important safeguard the country has against arbitrary, secret or unresponsive government. This is the place in Canada where grievances can be raised with most effect. To arbitrarily limit the right of members to speak is to limit the capacity of the government to understand and respond to the problems of Canadians.

I suggest we must remember that this is the only national forum in which spokesmen for all parts of Canada can speak and expect to be heard. I need not remind the house that different regions of the country have specific problems and points of view. Discussion in a national forum helps to knit the regions into a whole nation and to build a stronger unity. It seems likely that one of the serious casualties of any major limitation upon the time of debate would be the right of spokesmen to be adequately heard on the problems of the regions. I suggest that national unity would suffer.

When considering our constitution we take it for granted that we must consider the nature of our country. It seems equally obvious to me that when considering the rules of our House of Commons we must consider the nature of our country. Members of the opposition generally, as I understand it, approve and support the vast majority of the changes proposed in this report. Indeed, spokesmen for the opposition parties suggested many of these changes. We recognize that in some cases the traditional powers of opposition parties and private members are withdrawn or reduced, and we are prepared to accept this to the extent it is necessary to improve and strengthen parliament.

I will not dwell at length upon the obvious, but it is important to assert that the contest in this house is not a contest between reformers and intransigents. We on this side of the house have supported and proposed extensive reforms, all of which we believe will make parliament more effective, government more responsive and the private member a more useful part of the work of the house. We in this party, indeed, have additional reforms that we would like to see incorporated. We believe that government has the right and responsibility to govern. The rules of parliament should help the government to govern well. We support the reform of parliament. We support it enthusiastically and out of conviction. But we draw the line at certain fundamental and unnecessary changes which

[Mr. Stanfield.]

would deform parliament and make it ineffective. We draw the line at proposals which would put parliament in the hands of the government because that, we believe, would reverse the appropriate relation. Parliament must not be made subservient to the government. Parliament must continue to be responsible to the people through parliament. That is a parliamentary tradition and we defend it today, not because it is an old tradition or even because it is a British tradition but because it is a good tradition—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield:—and the best safeguard we have against arbitrary government. It is, in the final analysis, the only safeguard we have. At various stages we will have changes and improvements to suggest to the proposals made by the special committee. We shall have certain reforms to suggest on our part. I say in passing that whether the arrangements suggested by the committee for written amendments at the report stage are practical, you may, Mr. Speaker, find yourself flooded with amendments proposed in respect of important legislation with which you may find it very difficult to cope.

● (5:00 p.m.)

We will certainly be interested in the amendments and suggestions made by hon. members from all parts of the house and we will consider them carefully. Any proposal that seems to us to be likely to improve the effectiveness of parliament and the contribution of its members will be welcomed. Our attitude in this regard will continue to be constructive and co-operative.

But, sir, there is not the slightest chance that we will ever accept the proposal that the government majority should have the power to impose allocation of time in advance on any number of items on the order paper or before standing committees before a word has been uttered in the house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I should make a slight correction, Mr. Speaker. We would be allowed two hours to protest and then we would be crushed by the juggernaut of the just society.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: One must be frank. This is a vicious proposal, unnecessary, excessive and brutal in its potential impact on parliament