

Procedure and Organization

now being debated in the house. On December 12 I commenced my speech with these words, as reported at page 3894 of *Hansard*:

The debate on the rules now before us is of the utmost importance to Canada, it involves critical and essential components of the functioning of a democracy. Consideration of the matters under discussion should not be viewed from the standpoint of the mechanics of the matter, but rather from the standpoint of the principle involved and the consequences of our considerations on our democratic institutions. The mechanics are important in their place, but that place is still secondary to the principles involved.

The very manner in which rule 75c was pushed through the committee, having been introduced at the last moment and voted upon almost immediately, is an example of how the government has not heeded the advice given to it from all quarters of the house during the last rules debate before Christmas. It seems to me we must keep in mind some of the considerations raised at that time.

When the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) moved an amendment to the motion adopting the new rules prior to Christmas, his amendment in fact accepted the principle of time allocation in debates. This principle as such was recognized and accepted, I think, by all sides of the house.

As members will be aware, the key question is: How will this principle be applied? The application of the principle is the important thing. At that time the members of all opposition parties made their stand clear. They made it clear that they were not prepared to accept rule 16A or anything like rule 16A. It now seems that somehow or other their message failed to get through to the government.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Will the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Burton: Certainly.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: Trudeau's hatchet man.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I should like to object to the shouting; I think it is quite unbecoming. An hon. member does not have to accept a question, but if he does the hon. member who wants to ask the question should be allowed to do so without being subjected to this kind of conduct.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): The hon. member, and all hon. members opposite, accepted last December 20 the fact that the committee

[Mr. Burton.]

should look into the British procedure in relation to allocating time for debates. Would not the hon. member agree that the British procedure is more strict on the opposition than the proposal here?

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): But we do not have to accept it.

Mr. Burton: I agree that this was one of the proposals that the committee was to look into, following its terms of reference agreed to on December 20. The hearings of the committee were held in camera, but I trust that the committee gave full consideration to the British procedures. It seems to me that the terms of reference in no way imposed an obligation or duty on the committee to accept those particular procedures. Although they were valid points for study, anyone who listened to the debate at that time would realize that rule 75c would not have been acceptable to the opposition parties had it been proposed prior to Christmas.

In December, the principle of time allocation was accepted, and this principle was embodied in the wording of the amendment, as I pointed out in the debate at that time. It seems to me we have to be very careful in considering the British procedure and the British parliamentary practice. While we can certainly learn useful lessons from British parliamentary practice, and as all members know the pattern of our parliament is based in large part upon British parliamentary tradition, the fact is that there are important differences between the British parliamentary system and the Canadian House of Commons, our own practices and needs.

We live in a different type of country from Britain, which for the most part is a homogeneous nation where matters can be debated in more capsulized form. Britain does not have our geographical dimension with its many regional interests and concerns. It is at a more advanced stage of economic, political and social development.

Mr. Fairweather: The committee chairmen there are also neutral.

Mr. Burton: As pointed out by the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) the committee chairmen there are neutral. In addition, it should also be noted that the British House of Commons has some 625 members, whereas the Canadian House of Commons has 264. This simple arithmetical fact means, it seems to me, that members must