

Procedure and Organization

Your Honour by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, by any five hon. members who would invoke repeated adjournments until they got their way; or is this country to be governed by majority rule?

A great deal of talk has been directed to the government's alleged unwillingness to compromise. I was not present at the negotiations and can only take note of the statements of the house leaders. Some of the Conservatives who attended the meetings, to their credit, accepted the principle of majority rule in regard to time allocation and seek only a longer period for debate. I would have thought that under those circumstances a compromise would have been possible. But the N.D.P., as the hon. member for York South has indicated, do not accept majority rule at the report stage. If there is no majority rule at the report stage, there is no majority rule. The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the tyranny of the majority. But is that worse than tyranny of the minority?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kaplan: It has been suggested that these hot, political, controversial issues be referred to Mr. Speaker who would determine the time to be allocated. This is obviously unacceptable.

The most difficult opposition argument to answer is that this rule is entirely satisfactory to no one. There has been the suggestion that further negotiation might lead to what the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) called rapprochement. This might happen with the Conservatives, but never with the N.D.P. if they insist as a precondition that consensus prevail, because if it is to prevail in respect of the rules, it will prevail in respect of all our business. There is no difference between consensus in respect of the rules and consensus in respect of anything else.

The answer that satisfied me on this point was made in the house yesterday by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald), who affirmed on behalf of the government that it would honour the package deal compromise which it offered in its negotiations, and that it would be prepared to see the rules changed to that effect. As I said, that satisfied me.

Mr. Stanfield: It does not take much to satisfy you.

Mr. Kaplan: In its pursuit of the consensus principle the opposition has introduced a

theme, which was stressed again tonight by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley, which can only be described as a sort of blackmail. Speakers from all parties have stated repeatedly that if the rules cannot go their way, no business will be transacted in this chamber.

Mr. Forrestall: That is a harsh criticism of 1,000 years of democracy.

Mr. Kaplan: The hon. member for Annapolis Valley this evening said there is a scar tissue which will fester unless the government changes its position. What clearer threat could there be than that? There have been dozens of statements to this effect: if the opposition does not get its way, to hell with the majority, to hell with the business of the people. This is an interesting way of protecting a democracy. How does yesterday's performance differ from smashing computers at Sir George Williams University?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kaplan: How do these threats differ from throwing bombs in Montreal? No property was damaged here, but parliament was damaged.

One of the speakers in this debate said the other day that an opposition does not put the government out of power; the government puts itself out of power, and the opposition just puts the government out of its misery. If that has been true in the past, the next round may be, perhaps for the first time, a case of the opposition keeping itself out of power, reducing its constituency and doing itself real damage by its undemocratic approach to the procedures of this house.

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Kaplan: I will entertain a question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Barnett: I listened attentively to the hon. member because I thought he was trying to make a constructive contribution. Does he know of any other organization to which he has belonged wherein the constitution and by-laws are subject to change by a simple majority vote?

Mr. Kaplan: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. And, the constitution of Canada provides for changing the rules of this house by a majority vote.