

Procedure and Organization

I contend, therefore, that this whole way of doing things, bringing in rules in this way, is contrary to the rules and privileges of parliament, and that Your Honour should so find under Standing Order 51. Doing this takes the rules of debate out of the hands of members of parliament. It takes the rules of debate out of the rule book and puts them in the pocket of the government, in the pocket of the government house leader. It leaves all decision as to what time will be spent in debate to the caprice of the government. There is no more the matter of consent, no more the matter of collective action. This is being done in a manner which I submit is completely contrary to the rules and privileges of parliament.

I come back to what I said earlier because I think it needs to be emphasized. I have strong feelings about the details of 75c. With a few others I have been involved in seemingly endless discussion on these matters; in fact I said in a lighter vein to the President of the Privy Council in his office the other day that we started these discussions in his office last August and that we were getting pretty close to a full year of it.

I am concerned about the details of 75c, but that is not the issue. The issue is not the number of days to be spent at this or that stage of a bill. The issue is not the limitation of time for debate.

Indeed, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) tries to make out that we want to talk endlessly and never want to reach a decision, he knows he is just saying that. He knows that our rules are full of time limitations, limitations on the length of time a member can speak and limitations on this and that debate, and he knows there has never been a debate in the House of Commons in which every member has taken part. He knows that in point of fact we do reach decisions, and that the number of debates we have had in this session that have been lengthy have not done parliament any damage, they have done it credit. The fact of the matter is that these details are not the issue before us now, not the major issue in this whole debate of two or three weeks and certainly not the issue in this point of order.

• (4:40 p.m.)

The issue before us now is: how do we make our rules? Do we make them by collective action, do we make them by consent, or are they made for us by government majority? Because this motion denies collectivity, denies consent, because it is an attempt to make the rules by action of the government

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

majority, I call on Your Honour to apprise the house under Standing Order 51 that this is contrary to the rules and privileges of parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I apologize to the hon. member for interrupting him at this time. I was not too sure whether the hon. member was going to speak on the point of order, which allows for 20 minutes under Standing Order 33, or whether he should have the usual 40 minutes. I would be inclined to think that he is entitled to 20 minutes, but I assume that in view of the fact that he is discussing such an important point of order hon. members will allow him to continue. It is on this assumption that he has been invited to continue and to complete his remarks.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Thank you, Sir. My concluding remarks will be brief.

I know that there have been occasions when rules have been changed in other than the normal way. I know that in 1913 the closure rule itself, which has come back to haunt us again today, was put through not by having a committee with the Speaker as chairman but on a motion of the government. I know that under Mr. Pearson's government, after we had changed some rules by committee action, the present Solicitor General (Mr. McLraith), who was then house leader, piloted through the house a government motion regarding the change of certain rules. It has been done on some occasions, but most of the times rules have been changed, as Beauchesne says, by a committee which assisted Mr. Speaker, with the Clerk of the House as clerk of that committee.

You may say, Sir, that because it has been done sometimes the way it is now being done, and because no Speaker interfered, you should not do so now. But I point out to you, Sir, that we are under a different régime. On all of these other occasions the Speaker who was in the chair was a member of the government party. Impartial though each of them may have tried to be, that was a fact.

You, Sir, to your credit and to the credit of parliament, are the first Speaker who does not belong to a political party. You are a Speaker who is completely independent, and in my view you have to give consideration to your responsibility to both sides of the house.

You have to look at what have been the rules and privileges of parliament with respect to our rules and our Standing Orders. I