

Amendment to Standing Orders

of the debate there are one or two comments I want to make. The aspect of the motion that bothered me was the attempt to fix a rigid formula by which our rules would or could be changed. I do not like it being done in that way. I prefer the way that the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett) talked about, the method that we used for many decades, namely, consensus among the members of all the parties in the House.

Having listened to my hon. friend from Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair) I gather that it is the view on that side of the House that we should confirm the practice that we have had for a couple of rounds, namely, letting our rules be amended on the vote of a simple majority. If we are going to have a rigid form, then let us have one that protects the minority, and on that basis I would support the resolution now before us.

I would say, however, that common sense tells us that we should not rely on either of these formulas. Let us not have it confirmed as the practice for all time that a simple majority can dictate the rules of the House. Let us not have even a three-quarters majority so confirmed. Let us have the rule of consensus that has worked so well for many years. I am speaking not simply of the history I have read but of the history of some of the years I have been in this place.

I am afraid that my hon. friend from Grenville-Carleton confuses two things. He confuses the passing of legislation, the deciding of issues, and all the matters that come before Parliament and which a government that has been elected is committed to do something about, with the rules of this place, the constitution of this establishment, the things that were here when we came to this chamber, no matter which side of the House we are on. It is one thing to say that the government has the right by a simple majority to put through its program after debate, but it is another thing to say that the government of the day owns the place and has the right by a simple majority to change its rules.

Mr. Gibson: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. The hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Gibson) on a point of order.

Mr. Gibson: Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I thought the hon. member was raising a point of order.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Gibson: Well, would the hon. member permit a question?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): That is not a point of order. If the hon. member wants to ask a question, he requires the permission of the hon. member who has the floor.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He has it, but I think he should ask for it and not raise it as a point of order.

Mr. Gibson: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the erroneous manner in which I got to my feet. I wish to ask the hon. member a question.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Go ahead.

Mr. Gibson: The hon. member just made reference to the constitution, the provisions of the British North America Act. I believe unintentionally he gave the impression that the wording was different from what it is. Has the hon. member got the section from which he quoted, because I am sure the words used are not the words that are in the act?

• (5:50 p.m.)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): In my reference just now I was not talking of the constitution, the British North America Act; I was talking about the rules, the set-up, the way in which this place is constituted. I suggest that is something that has been worked out by consensus of the Parliaments we have had in the past 100 years, and that no one government here between two elections has the moral right to change that without the consensus of the House as a whole. We have been back and forth over this point. We went through it, of course, at great length in the debate last June and the debate the previous December.

I submit my friend the hon. member for Comox-Alberni is right, that the consensus way is much the better way. I am very sorry to hear the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton state the position from that side of the House that because they are in power they think they have the right to change the rules of this place. I might in parentheses ask what we stayed here for last July. We stayed around all that month on the infamous rule 75-C which has never been used. Of course, it cannot be used anyway, so we wasted that month.