

part of defenders and friends of parliament. I assume that all of us, being here, would support and defend the purposes of parliament.

It is not a simple task, in an age impressed by urgency and efficiency, to defend an institution whose purpose is to deter legislation that is bad, sometimes to delay, and sometimes indeed to oppose to the end bad legislation. It is not easy to make Canadians, who are accustomed to their freedoms, aware when these freedoms are under threat. I would hope that no one on either side of the house would use the weaknesses of legislatures in the public esteem to weaken parliament further.

The great majority of the members of this house know that if parliament becomes a rubber stamp it becomes useless. That is the main reason for being here, and one weapon we possess is our ability on occasion to compel the government to reassess its measures and force it to change or even to halt a course of action which we believe to be inadequate or wrong. If that were not necessary parliament would not be necessary. But governments make mistakes, even governments with computers. A government which knows it must face an effective opposition will take more care than will a government which has the power under its rules to disarm the opposition. Members of a government are not perfect. Lord Acton, a brilliant man, a man I believe admired by the Prime Minister, (Mr. Trudeau), said in the course of a well known quotation:

• (4:50 p.m.)

There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.

Members of a government are subject to fault like the rest of us. The function of the opposition is by our probing to reveal and correct those faults, by our presence and by our powers to make the government more careful, to make the government more compassionate, to make the government more responsive to the needs of the people of this country.

There are some facts to establish about parliament and about parliamentary reform. The first is that the problems that frustrate Canada were not created here in parliament, and they will not be solved by a mere amendment of the rules of parliament. It was not the rules of parliament that caused inflation, created a crisis in housing, or slowed the sales of grain. It is not the reform of parliament which will produce a satisfactory foreign policy, bring growth to our economy,

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reduce unemployment, end the alienation of the young or reduce the strains within confederation. Parliament is not the cause of these frustrations, and parliament ought not to be the victim or the scapegoat of them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: The second fact is related to the first. It is that changes in the rules will not radically or suddenly increase the quantity or the quality of the output of this parliament. There will be improvements, I would hope, but there is no magic in procedure, no magic that will cause the government to draft more and better laws quickly, above all, no magic that will produce policies and solutions where there have been none produced to date.

If this government had no opposition at all to face it would still be behind. It would still face a backlog of things it should be doing and problems it has not been able to solve. That, after all, is the fate of governments in a changing and complex time, in a changing and complex country. We are not going to transform the capacity of this government simply by amending the rules of parliament. There is no magic wand, and there should be no attempt to suggest that these or any other changes to the rules will suddenly and as if by magic make the government efficient.

The third fact is that the purpose of parliamentary reform is not simply to serve efficiency, as the hon. member who introduced the motion seemed to believe, important though efficiency naturally is. The purpose, rather, is to work out a process of debate and legislation which is consistent with the democratic values of the Canadian people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I emphasize that. We do not simply need a procedure which passes laws. We need a procedure which also passes the demanding test of free and adequate debate. It is not enough to be concerned merely with the efficiency of the process. I would assume that the legislative process in the Soviet Union is very efficient. But we are a different kind of country and the rules of our parliamentary debate must reflect and protect that difference. We must not demean the importance of debate. Of course, there must be reasonable limits upon the time parliament spends in discussion. But there must also be time for adequate discussion here. The right of discussion and debate, the associated right