

*Procedure and Organization*

as exhibited in the proposed rule changes, will lead to political oblivion for most of them.

The proposals by this administration to muzzle free speech, and slyly to attempt to initiate rules which will force closure in advance of adequate debate are a sure sign that those leading the government are totally unaware of the mood of our present day society. More than ever before those in our society, especially the young people, are demanding more discussion, more information, more answers and more participatory democracy.

These cannot be obtained when those in power try to gag a democratically elected parliament which should give the lead to our people in discussing fully those major problems which will shape the future of the nation. In parliamentary terms, closure is an odious word. It is something that should be used rarely. Closure in advance of adequate debate which proposed rule 75c could well bring about is no credit to those in the present administration who advocate its acceptance.

Complete and utter disregard for our parliamentary democracy has been the earmark of this administration. It was first demonstrated last December in its abortive attempt to foist rule 16A on parliament. It is demonstrated again in its attempt to force rule 75c, which is very similar to rule 16A, on an unwilling House of Commons.

It is interesting to note that last December, when the government was forced to withdraw rule 16A because of Canada-wide opposition, the Prime Minister indicated that the government did not really want it. He claimed that the opposition had been trapped and tripped by the government. He told the press that the opposition was forced to focus on rule 16A so that all the other rule changes would be accepted. He implied that the government had never really wanted to put 16A into effect and that it was used only as a ploy to fool the opposition. However, in view of the introduction of 75c we might well question the credibility of the Prime Minister's statement on the December debate.

If the government did not want another closure rule in December, why does it want one now? As I mentioned before, not one piece of legislation requested by the government had been held up from passage through the House of Commons by the June 27 adjournment date. The only delay in important legislation this session is due to the fact that the various ministers have not prepared and brought into the house for consideration

[Mr. Harding.]

some very important legislation promised to the Canadian people many months ago. This government, not the opposition, has delayed legislation. I need only mention the Canada Water Act, the Canadian Development Corporation Act and the proposed legislation on the Woods report recommendations, so desperately needed by the veterans, as fields in which there have been government promises but no action.

We are told that the government needs 75c so that it can program its work. I suggest that the best parliamentary system in the world could not work effectively if an inefficient government were doing the programming. Evidence of inefficiency in programming so far as the government is concerned is to be found everywhere. This current debate on parliamentary rule changes is the most important issue with which this particular parliament will have to deal.

The key issue before us today is a simple one. It is the right of all elected members to speak fully and freely in the house on the issues affecting our nation, and our whole system of parliamentary democracy revolves around it. It is difficult to believe that in Canada today any party or any minister, would dare to ask for the sweeping and restrictive powers outlined in section 75c. It is equally difficult to understand how any member of this house could support this obvious government move to muzzle the opposition.

If rule 75c is passed, private members—we are all in the same position, with the exception of those who sit in the cabinet and the leaders of the various parties—could be effectively gagged in major debates from presenting alternatives to government proposals. The opposition could be denied the opportunity effectively to make the nation fully aware of contentious legislation. The citizens of our nation could be denied the right to hear all sides of contentious issues and might not be given time to make their views known to those who sit in the parliament of Canada. This is the crux of the rule change.

By including this rule we might well eliminate all the citizens of Canada outside the house from participating in the workings of parliament. If rule 75c is passed the government could by law force any piece of legislation through parliament with only four days of debate, including the second reading stage, the committee stage, the report stage and third reading stage. All the talk in the world by government members cannot change that fact. This is evident from a reading of the amendment.