

Business of the House

last weekend in Quebec City concerning a provincial premier, all this amounts to the same thing. It shows that this government thinks that it is infallible. Liberals have been in power more than 47 years out of 56. This shows their arrogance, and it is time for democracy to really come through in Canada. Mr. Speaker, the way the government imposes its will is revolting.

Mr. Guay (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Fortin: The hon. member for Lévis is protesting because of the way I am talking. Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I would point out to him that I have the right to say what I want in this House during the time allotted to me under the rules laid down by his party. I imagine that one day the same member for Lévis will be in the opposition. I hope so for his sake. It will do him good, Mr. Speaker. He will fall back on his feet in democracy and stop thinking he is someone else because he is on the government side. At that time he will probably talk in the same way as I am doing, and he will be given the chance to either sit in the opposition or stay at home. I urge him to try and understand the Canadian parliamentary system and stop flouting the right of members to express openly the opinion of their voters.

Mr. Speaker, the use of the closure in an area as crucial as social security in a field of jurisdiction where there is so much money involved as medicare shows how little social security matters to this government. To them, they are only words uttered in a strictly electoral purpose. Mr. Speaker, unless it changes its attitude the days of this government are certainly numbered.

Mr. Bob Kaplan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): The hon. member for Lotbinière said at least one thing on which I agree. He pointed out that if the opposition were in the place of the government it would do precisely the same thing the government is doing now, that is opposing—

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. Mr. Speaker, I am really quite surprised by what my hon. friend who misinterpreted my words just said. I suggested that if the Liberals were in the opposition, they would probably say the same thing. But I am not surprised the hon. member should, intentionally twist my words to use them. When arrogance reaches the point where closure is imposed, one can resort to just about anything.

Mr. Guay (Lévis): I wonder if the words of the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) were not misinterpreted, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I thank him for having proclaimed my election in 1978 by telling me that, either in the opposition or in power, I shall then sit in this House. I thank him very much.

I am told now that there is talk of closure. We have had a debate, Mr. Speaker, on this bill, for eleven days now. Is that democracy, is that reaching decisions or is it filibustering? If that is what the hon. member for Lotbinière is suggesting to the Canadian people, then I wish he would go and say it outside the House.

[Mr. Fortin.]

[English]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Withdraw the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. That is not a point of order, that is a point of debate.

Mr. Kaplan: I apologize to the hon. member if I misunderstood his remarks. I did not intend to misinterpret, and I apologize if I did.

It is important to make the point, as the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) did, that this is not to be the end of debate on this bill. The bill has a long way to go. We are only on second reading. It must go to committee, where, as the minister said, amendments will be moved. The bill will be reported back to the House, and there will be further opportunities at the report stage as well as at third reading for discussion. Any who say that limiting debate at this stage will be the end of the bill and that the government is arrogantly going its own way are totally misrepresenting the facts.

On second reading we deal with the principles of the bill. Surely the opposition cannot dispute that it has made known its views on the principles of the bill. Thirty Conservative members spoke once, and two spoke twice on the principle of the bill. Of the NDP, nine members spoke once and four spoke twice on the principle of the bill. Without doubt, the country has been given the opportunity to know the views of the opposition on the principle of the bill, and the government has had full opportunity to understand the opposition's view on that principle. I ask, when will debate end? When will the government be allowed to exercise its responsibilities?

I am, as you know, parliamentary secretary and have had the pleasure of listening to the entire debate. From time to time I have tried to discover if and when the debate is to come to a natural end. I have checked with members of the Conservative party, and met with virtually the same response every time, "There are 15 more speakers." Well, there were 15 more speakers on the first day of debate, 15 more on the ninth day, and 15 more on the last day we debated this bill. I asked NDP members when they thought debate on this bill would come to a natural end. I learned that the NDP does not want debate on the bill to come to a natural end. It does not want debate to end. It wants the bill to be withdrawn.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Kaplan: NDP members are entitled to their opinion but are they entitled to prolong debate forever and prevent a vote on the bill?

An hon. Member: Sometimes the opposition is right, you know.

Mr. Kaplan: If hon. members opposite think that is their right, they misunderstand the role of the opposition in this Chamber. Their attitude makes it impossible to deal with this legislation. How can one pass legislation if it is not allowed to come to a vote? The NDP are entitled to want the bill withdrawn, and entitled to so argue. But there are rights on the other side. Surely they have no right to prevent a vote on this bill, they cannot prolong debate so