

Procedure and Organization

• (9:20 p.m.)

rule 16A. But, Mr. Speaker, rule 75c demonstrates that such was not the case. Rule 75c introduced following the demise of rule 16A, demonstrates that this government is determined one way or the other to acquire a degree of raw, naked power that goes far beyond what the people of this country conceive as properly belonging to the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Burton: This question must be asked: why do they want this power? What do they intend to bring before parliament in the coming months? Is there legislation coming which will be unacceptable to the house and country, and which the government is going to ram down the country's throat? Can they only do this if they have rule 75c at their disposal?

The manner in which operations of the house are carried on, and the way we can expect the government to use this rule, was illustrated today when the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), my colleague, suggested seriously to the government as a result of questions asked both yesterday and today that one of the allotted days the opposition had foregone prior to the end of the session should be used to discuss the serious wheat situation and the consequent farm income situation in western Canada.

This one day, could have been granted without any problem. The wheat question is very important, as is obvious, and as is recognized on all sides of the house. The debate would have lasted one day, and that would have been the end of it. But again we saw how unresponsive the President of the Privy Council is to positive and constructive proposals coming from this side of the house. If this is the type of response we are to continue to get from the government benches, and from the President of the Privy Council, then we have to view with suspicion some of the powers the government is attempting to acquire unto itself. My colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and other members have already demonstrated that there has been a reasonable dispatch of business during the present session. In fact, had some of the legislation that was presented been more adequate, there would have been less debate, not more. Debate is often occasioned by the inadequacy of the legislation and measures that are placed before the house.

It should also be pointed out that in another session there will presumably be need for only one budget rather than the two we had this session. Some of the other rules changes, such as the changed approach to supply bills, will have effect for a full session and will result in further time for the conduct of other items of public business. Hopefully, unless the government persists in the type of approach it is adopting at the present time, we might even have less time spent on the discussion of rules changes, presuming that somehow or other we will be able to get through to the government and persuade them that they are not going to ram this sort of proposal down the throats of members of parliament.

Why does the government need these powers for which it is asking? It has been demonstrated during this session that the opposition members have been reasonable. Among other things, the opposition has relinquished two days of the throne speech debate. It allowed the time for consideration of the 1968-69 business of supply to be cut from 35 days to 17½ days. I note as well that following Christmas, the 1969-70 estimates were dealt with in committees. Two days of the second budget debate were surrendered by the opposition, and there were two opposition allotted days which were postponed at the end of June and not taken up by the opposition.

Is this what the government calls obstruction? Is the opposition being difficult? Anybody who suggests that the opposition has been obstructive in this session lusts for powers that all members should be wary of granting. Members of the government and supporters of the government should take heed of the old proverb: "They who live by the sword shall perish by the sword". This proverb has application in two ways. First, it could lead to the demise of this government. Secondly, I suggest members on the government benches should consider carefully just what their situation is going to be when once again they are sitting on this side of the house—at least, those with some chance of political survival.

I have made a number of references to the rules debate that took place prior to Christmas. It seems to me that some of the principles that were enunciated on several occasions should have been kept in mind by the government and those who support the proposal