

Procedure and Organization

This is by an important personage—I shall give his name in a moment—saying that the opposition shares equally with the government the responsibility of making parliament work. I ask: how can the opposition share equally with the government that responsibility if it is hog-tied by rules that the government insists on imposing on the house, and that under closure? I quote further from the document I have in my hand:

One of the tests of good and strong democracy is the acceptance without qualification of the role of the opposition as an indispensable element in its processes, with rights to be safeguarded and with responsibilities to be discharged.

That test has not been met, and democracy has been lost, when opposition has degenerated into faction or when authority has become tyranny.

That is a quotation from the right hon. Lester B. Pearson.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I am glad to see a few Liberals applauding him.

An hon. Member: The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) didn't.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The role of the opposition is equal to that of the government. This is the same theory, the same philosophy that I read from Beauséjour's. I submit that when, in the making of the rules of the house, the government says, "We will give you no part; we are deciding what the rules are to be", that is contrary to the rules and privileges of parliament. Let me quote one more authority:

Notwithstanding these increasing demands, the time available to this house each week for the conduct of its business is not significantly greater than it was a century ago, nor have the traditional and proper roles of government and opposition changed.

They are still the same.

It is the government's function to propose legislative solutions. It is the opposition's task to question these solutions and attempt to improve them or propose alternatives.

Then this sentence, short, to the point, and I support every syllable of it:

Neither role can be subordinate to the other.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I submit that it is Your Honour's responsibility to see that this dictum is observed, that the role of neither side in this house is made subordinate to the other. That should be the

case in every aspect of our work, but when it comes to the fundamental matter of our rules, if ever that dictum applied, it applies there. We are not called upon to sit here in a subordinate position, to be told by the other side what our rules shall be. I continue this quotation:

It goes without saying that any proposal for procedural reform must assist both sides of this house to function more efficiently. Anything less would diminish the very institution which we seek to assist.

That is a clear statement of the equality of the two sides, an equality that is being violated. Never mind the details of rule 75c; I am not concerned about that at the moment, but I am concerned about a government proposal being brought in the way it has, being put through this house by a government majority, and under closure. This same authority went on to refer to certain discussions which had taken place, and he said:

Nor should they—

Referring to the discussions.

—be permitted to lead, either by agreement or in the absence of it, to procedural changes which will upset the delicate and essential balance between government and opposition so necessary to the proper functioning of parliament.

That is a quotation from the right hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau. See *Hansard*, September 16, 1968, pages 72 and 73.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I note that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is applauding himself.

Mr. McCleave: He didn't know they were his own words.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I hope he will pay attention to what he said—

Mr. Dinsdale: He is schizophrenic.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):—namely, that there is a delicate and essential balance between government and opposition which is necessary to the proper functioning of parliament. This ties in to a matter that is basic to our whole operation, namely, our rules. We are being put in a subordinate position. We are being denied operating under collective action. We are being denied the right to consent. This is being done on the basis of an external authority, namely, the government.