

of securing approval for proposed changes from as many hon. members as possible. But I should hate to see us placed in a position where we were paralysed, where we were subject to the veto of minority groups and where we could not act if action became necessary.

• (5:40 p.m.)

**Mr. Barnett:** Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the hon. member whether he really understands what he has been saying. He says a majority party has never been defeated, which implies there has never been a change in government in Canada since Confederation. A minority has been increased so as to become a majority many times, and the contrary has also happened. Is this not correct?

**Mr. Blair:** Certainly the whole nature of our politics is that parties change, that governments change, and I have never yet heard anybody contend that this is not in the public interest. What I am saying is that when particular actions are taken in this House, whether by the enactment of legislation, the passage of substantive resolutions, the passage of estimates or the passage of procedural rules, somebody is accountable for what takes place. Under our present system the persons who are accountable, by and large, are the members of the majority who support the government then in power. If they make improper use of this power, if they act unwisely, then there is, as we all know, a very fast and sometimes overly efficient way for the public to deal with them.

I do not think that the view which the public takes of this chamber is one that should compel any hon. member to feel that we should adopt a procedure which would paralyse us in the nature of making further amendments to our rules. I have said before, and I have no hesitancy in saying again, that the view that the public takes of this House is, unhappily, far from being a laudatory one. I think all hon. members, whether they sit on this side or on the opposition side are aware of the fact that the public feel that many of our procedures, notwithstanding the great reforms that have been made, are outmoded, that we still are not in tune with the times and with the necessity for transacting large and important items of public business in time to confer essential benefits on the community.

I cannot share all the criticisms that are made of this chamber because some of them

#### *Amendment to Standing Orders*

are made in ignorance of the true nature of the parliamentary process. But there is indubitably a feeling in the country that we are not quite doing our job, and I think that the public at large would view with alarm and dismay any suggestion that further reforms of procedure in this Parliament could only be possible if very rigorous procedural rules could be met.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, of the current view of our Parliament, let me refer to an editorial which appeared in the *Iroquois Post* for Wednesday, April 8, written by Peter Ward who is said to be a *Toronto Telegram* syndicate reporter. The article is entitled "It's a sad Parliament" and reads in part as follows:

Early in the daily proceedings of Parliament comes that 40-minute exchange between the opposition and government known as the "question period". It's basically a time when cabinet ministers can expect to be put on the griddle for their sins, hence that 40 minutes often produces the best news copy of the day.

The question period certainly hasn't been the same since the Pearson-Diefenbaker personality feuds have been replaced by the Trudeau cool and the Stanfield stammer.

The opposition in this Parliament has been terrible. There has been no concentrated probing for government weaknesses, although Lord knows there are many, and very few strong personalities have emerged from the non-government side of the House.

Some of the few opposition backbenchers who have tackled the government have received little or no help from the more august names in the front row, where the occupants seem bent on playing the worn-out game of party politics, forgetting that public opinion has consistently rejected such shenanigans for years.

The old-liners have lost their credibility.

It is a hard thing for us to accept the fact that this kind of editorial column comment is made across the country about our proceedings, but it does reflect what is a basic view of this Parliament. I suggest that not only in terms of democratic and parliamentary principle, but in keeping the mood of modern Canada it would be a mistake for us to adopt a proposal such as that made by the hon. member and lock ourselves into a position where any important changes in the rules of this chamber could only be made over the power of a small group of members to veto and defeat them.

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, when I intervened on the point of order I suggested that I was not completely happy with the proposal made in my colleague's motion. However, in the light