

Procedure and Organization

be. Nevertheless, I wholeheartedly believe that the theory that the volume of legislation passed by a government is in direct proportion to that government's worth is a complete and fallacious myth. It is the quality, not the quantity of legislation that determines the value of a government and the benefit it may be to the people it governs.

Parliament not only has a responsibility to pass good legislation, but the responsibility to amend or reject bad legislation. In a democracy, that is its most vital responsibility. The notion that because we are living in a modern computer age with instant communication we have to do everything quickly, in less and less time in my opinion does not follow. To hear some people speak, their logic appears to be that the rules of parliament were laid down before the theory of relativity was discovered and therefore they are out of date. They say modern rules of parliament should be such as to expedite the business of parliament at a speed greater than the speed of light. Nothing could be more fallacious.

If we carry through this desperate desire for shorter and shorter debates, more voluminous legislation passed in a shorter period, we arrive at a point of absurdity. We will reach the position where members of parliament will be advised a day or two before parliament is to sit that the legislation the government proposes to consider is deemed to have already been passed and therefore we need not sit at all. We would be in the position of the lady in the limerick:

There was a young lady named Bright
Whose speed was greater than light,
She left home one day,
In a relative way,
And returned home on the previous night.

The government would like to be in the position where, when they think something is right, the shorter the time spent on it the better. If we got to the position where the length of time would be a negative figure, that would be even better. In this connection, Mr. Speaker, I wish to quote again from Beauchesne, page 110:

The mere object of shortening sessions may lead to an undue curtailment of the freedom of speech. The duties of a representative Parliament are too important to be performed in a hurry. No question should be decided until it has been fully discussed. Although some effort ought to be made to economize time, every shade of opinion has the right to find expression and members who desire to give their views should not be prevented from doing so. Canada is a vast country, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The problems of the West are not those of the East. The viewpoints

of members of Parliament from British Columbia and the Prairie Provinces differ from those of Ontario; Ontario differs from Quebec; and Quebec from the Maritime Provinces. For this reason debates in the House are necessarily lengthy. A two-month session, if it is mismanaged, is more wasteful of time than a six-month session during which no time has been lost. Debates have to be free and they must also be relevant. In Parliament every corner of the country is represented and no rule should silence elected representatives when they think they have a message to deliver. Freedom of speech is a sacred principle and if there is a place where it should be fully respected that place is the Parliament of the nation, and it is the Speaker's responsibility to see that this principle is not infringed upon.

• (5:10 p.m.)

Most people without thinking too much about it, glibly equate democracy with the existence of a parliament. Examples that come to mind immediately are of Canada, the United States, Great Britain and France. In each of these countries there is a parliament; therefore, it is assumed there is also a democracy. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, it just does not follow that if you have a democracy you have a parliament, or that if you have a parliament you have a democracy. This is tantamount to saying that because all Parisians are Frenchmen, all Frenchmen are Parisians.

There is a parliament of sorts in Russia which does things very expeditiously. The government tells parliament its program for the year and parliament rubberstamps it in a matter, I think, of three or four days. Then, the parliamentarians go home, and that is their role.

I suggest that what determines whether you have a democracy is whether you have an opposition that is free, that has the right to dissent, to expose to public debate the importance of differing points of view, to expose weaknesses in any program proposed by government. This is the keystone of the democratic system. Democracy has flowered when parliamentarians have held mature and enlightened views, when it has been recognized that in electing them to office the public did not want them to be dictators but rather to hold office for a short period as the servants of the people. Governments should never lose sight of the fact that they are elected to be the people's servants and not their masters.

We should remember that the rules and practices of parliament are the possession of the whole house; they are not the government's possession or the prerogative of the government of the day. It is true that in the