

a few brief observations at this time. It will be recalled that in the speech from the throne the following appeared:

My government intends to ask you to reconstitute the special committee on procedure of the house and request it to make recommendations on the elimination of closure of debates in the House of Commons.

It is in pursuance of that undertaking and promise that this matter now comes before this house.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that on a number of occasions the committee has operated in previous sessions and I think, generally speaking, members of the house will agree that the recommendations made have been beneficial to the efficiency and effectiveness of the house. Indeed, I believe that consideration might be given at some later session to having this committee set up each year as a standing committee.

The resolution, as it has been written by the Clerk, asks that consideration be given to the desirability of dealing with standing order No. 33. The purpose of the motion is to enable the House of Commons, through this committee, to give consideration to this very important matter. I could go back over a period of years and point out circumstances which necessitated action being taken in this regard. I could relive past days; but today I have such a feeling of good will to all that I shall not go into that unless pressed to do so by hon. members in any part of the house.

All of us agree that full and free debate is necessary in the parliamentary system, the examination without restraint of the programs and policies advanced not only by the government but by those in the opposition who would provide an alternative government. In the process of national decision-making, the role of parliament is pre-eminent and vital. I believe, in the light of the experience of the past, the principle of closure need no longer be accepted under our system.

There have been tremendous changes since 1913, when it was first introduced in Canada. In the intervening years a number of committees have been set up for the purpose of considering the rules and a number of changes have been made, with the result that the time within which discussions can take place in parliament has been reduced. When closure was first introduced in 1913, parliament had had the experience over a period of three or four years of unlimited discussion. Indeed, in the debates in 1910 and 1911 and again in 1912 and 1913; in debates earlier on the navy bill and on the subject of reciprocity, and later, again on the navy bill, legislation introduced by the Borden government, the House of Commons sat for an almost unlimited time. I have not recently reviewed this, but I think there were a number of occasions

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when the house sat by day and by night for more than a week, broken only by Sundays.

Then came the changes. There was the determination of the length of speeches, first limited within recent years to 40 minutes and then reduced still further in the house. In committee, in recent years changes have reduced the time to 20 minutes.

I know there are issues upon which lengthy speeches are necessary on the part of the leaders of the government and of the opposition, but generally speaking my own experience in the house has been this. After half an hour or 35 or 40 minutes one has been able to say all that would be necessary on any particular subject. All of us, because of the limitations placed on speaking time, tend to make the maximum the minimum. I know that is human nature. When we decided we would set a limit of 40 minutes on speeches in the house, hon. members found it necessary to speak 40 minutes; otherwise it might be said that they had not fully covered all the matters they should have covered in the period available to them.

When closure was introduced originally there was unlimited time. I believe everything we can do to improve the standards of parliament should be done. The doctrine of parliamentary supremacy demands the maintenance not only of the forms of parliamentary government but also of its soul. I said that in this house six years ago and I still believe it to be true. I also said on an earlier occasion that it is the right and duty of the opposition to advance their arguments and to educate public opinion. I still hold this view.

I believe I was elected to this chamber for the first time 22 years ago today. In the intervening years I have tried to look at parliament objectively, to understand that indefinable something that comes only from membership. I often hear people say that if they were in parliament they would do thus and so. Well, all of us have those views when we become members for the first time, but in the passing years we find that the rules governing debate are necessary, based on experience, and generally speaking provide every opportunity for full discussion.

We in parliament have a duty to preserve the freedom of debate because our freedom, the freedom of parliament, is essential to the freedom of the people we represent. When we have rules that confine or limit our freedom in debate we are permitting rules that also limit freedom in Canada outside parliament as well.

I need hardly quote anyone in that connection, but permit me to recall the words of the late Mr. Ernest Lapointe who, speaking in the house on March 29, 1932, said: