

Procedure and Organization

will proceed. But to judge from our experience over the last eight or nine years, we know that we do not necessarily proceed that way. We must therefore provide some means for the government, which is responsible to the people, to bring matters to a head. A decision has to be made and it seems to me that the residual responsibility for the conduct of business in the House of Commons must belong to the government party, that party which has been given responsibility for the conduct of the nation's business by the Canadian electorate. The residual responsibility must therefore rest with the governing party. An article in today's *Globe and Mail* by Mr. George Bain makes that clear. I wish to read one small part of his argument since it illustrates clearly the position in which we find ourselves:

It would be in any government's own interest to try to get agreement on a time allocation—why provoke howls of outrage needlessly?—but, if there is to be a time allocation procedure at all, the power to propose must rest somewhere to be used on those occasions when agreement proves impossible.

I suggest that the government, in its proposals, wishes to accept that responsibility. In cases when no compromise is possible, when honest consultation has failed, the government feels that it must use its majority. It has the power to use its majority, and that majority ought to be made use of by the government. For the opposition to say that responsibility for action in this field rests with it is a travesty of democracy. The opposition is not elected to govern. It is elected to oppose.

An hon. Member: That is just what we are doing.

Mr. Reid: It has a duty to point out what it considers weaknesses and shortcomings in the government's program. Once it has done that its responsibility is discharged. The government, on the other hand, has its responsibilities to discharge and it will stand or fall during the next election on how it has discharged those responsibilities.

Mr. Dinsdale: The tyranny of the majority.

Mr. Reid: The opposition seems to imply that the moment proposed rule 75c is incorporated in the Standing Orders of the house, the world will end. I do not think it will. This rule is merely a modification and extension of changes that were introduced last December. In any event, I suggest to hon. members of the opposition that the House of

[Mr. Reid.]

Commons is not the only democratic institution in this country. Parliament includes the Senate, and in the past the Senate has applied a brake to the activities of the House of Commons.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Shame.

Mr. Reid: I thought my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) would appreciate my remark.

Mr. Alexander: I wonder whether the hon. member would permit a question. Would he mind reverting to the earlier part of his notes and explain in detail what he meant when he said that he would consider seriously sending this report back to the committee? His remarks were somewhat ambiguous and for the edification of the house perhaps he would not mind elaborating on what he meant.

Mr. Reid: I am sorry if I was not clear. What I said was that under proposed rule 75b the Leader of the Official Opposition ought to be recognized. The two minority opposition parties should not be in a position of forcing their decisions on this house, along with the government, on the official opposition. The Leader of the Official Opposition, being a responsible officer of this house, should have an important role to play under this proposed rule. I point out that here I do not speak for the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacDonald) or the government.

Mr. Alexander: We are aware of that.

Mr. Reid: That is the position I have taken, and I think it quite defensible.

It is important to remember that under the new rules bills will be before the house for a period of 13 days of elapsed time plus two weekends, or a total of 17 days, long enough for people to be made aware of the substance of bills. Although the House of Commons is the most important institution in our democratic system, it is not the be-all and end-all of democracy, being merely an institution which reflects in its make-up and membership the wishes of electors who have elected their members to parliament in order to carry out a certain program. The government has certain time at its disposal to carry out that program. It is when debates take far longer than they should, when they continue long past the day when a decision ought to have been taken, that the very institution of parliament is held in odium. The whole concept of democracy suffers then because people ask how we can govern them if we cannot govern