

*Procedure and Organization*

things affecting fundamental rights than politicians are often prone to think. On occasion public response might be slow or tardy; but it is there and any politician ignores it at his peril. Thus government backbenchers are faced with an important and difficult choice. Do they stand up to the autocratic decrees delivered to them by those in control of their party or do they allow their party to slide down the long, slippery slope which eventually leads to political oblivion.

At the beginning of this session, Mr. Speaker, a special committee was established to examine the rules of the house. The report of that committee was submitted to the house before the Christmas recess, and it was debated at that time. Some changes proposed were acceptable on this side of the house. Those included substantial changes in the structure of operations in parliament. The benefits of those changes are now evident in terms of dispatch of business this session. While problems remain, such as the manner and effectiveness of the operations of committees, there can be no question that business has been expedited. There are other questions, as well, that remain to be considered, among them being the whole question of communication between parliament as an institution, individual members in this house and the public at large.

Similarly, the question of whether legislation is adequate in the view of an individual member has nothing to do with the assessment of the effectiveness of these rule changes. Rule changes, just by themselves, do not produce a better parliament, do not produce better legislation or better government programs. These depend on the programs that in fact are introduced by the government, and the effectiveness of those programs. However, Mr. Speaker, in the midst of these very acceptable rule changes which were introduced before Christmas, rule 16A stuck out like a sore thumb, or like one rotten apple in a barrel, to use another type of expression. It was bad in itself and in time would spoil everything around it. As justification for the proposal to give the government arbitrary and sole power to limit debate, government members pointed to the small amount of business disposed of up to that time. In that debate I dealt with this point as will be seen by reference to pages 3896 and 3897 of *Hansard* for December 12 and pages 3914 and 3915 of *Hansard* for December 13. I will not go into detail with respect to points I made at that time, but I commend those pages to all members in order that they may

[Mr. Burton.]

gain, by reading them, a better picture of the business that had been transacted and dealt with by this house even prior to the rule changes adopted before the Christmas recess.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, I pointed out that from September 12 until the commencement of the rules debate, there were 60 sitting days. Some 36½ of these days were consumed with the opening day, the throne speech debate, the first budget and budget debates, supply and interim supply debates the length of which was based on agreement reached between the leaders of the various parties, and one day on which we did not sit. On that day no business was transacted because the house adjourned out of respect for the late premier Johnson of Quebec who had just passed away. Also there were debates involved in establishing the committees on procedure and statutory instruments. Although the Prime Minister stated at that time that only nine measures or bills prior to the Christmas recess had passed through parliament, the actual number of bills was eleven, and consideration had commenced on five other measures.

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald), and others on the government benches, complained about a number of measures which had not received consideration in the house during the present session. However, the President of the Privy Council fails to recognize that the house spent nine days debating rule 16A prior to Christmas; those nine days could have been used to consider other items of business.

I grant you, Mr. Speaker, that some time would have been required for us to consider other arguments stemming from the committee report—indeed, some aspects required further consideration—but there can be no question that the government's attempt to bulldoze rule 16A through the house consumed valuable time. In my view, they cannot have it both ways. If they insist on foisting measures such as rule 16A and rule 75c on the house, they are going to have to accept the consequences.

Hon. members know that the subject of time allocation was referred to a special committee in the new year as a result of the agreement that was reached just prior to the Christmas recess. This occurred after it became clear even to the government that they could not ram rule 16A down the throats of the house or country. Surely, it would have been reasonable to have expected the government to be sensitive to its experience with