

*Procedure and Organization*

The final feature of the last two days on which I want to comment as a foundation for the points I should like to make is the demonstration we have had in the last two days that closure, in its 1913 variety, will no longer work against the style of dissent which we encounter these days. Then, if time allocation is appropriate, which is what I want to discuss, a new method is required. The proposed rules 75A, 75B and 75C are, generally speaking, such a measure although they would not apply to debates on changes in the rules. The question is, are the rights of parliament and of members of parliament really dead as a result of 75A, B and C? Is participatory democracy over? Have the rights of hon. members been extinguished? This is what I should like to consider.

On Tuesday night the member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) observed that parliament was just as much a place for the opposition as it was for the government. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said this afternoon, that the right of the opposition was equal to the right of the government in the house. I go further than this and say, in a special sense, that parliament is more the opposition's place, and that in some respects the opposition's role is more important here than the role of the government.

I could sum up the difference by saying that the opposition expresses itself and performs its functions in this chamber; the government, on the other hand, expresses itself in its legislation and in its administration, not only by what it in fact achieves by way of a legislative program, but by way of what it fails to achieve.

We can talk in this chamber around the clock and around the calendar. Government members can produce the most beautiful speeches you have ever heard. Every member of this chamber can speak for 20 minutes or 40 minutes on every section of every bill. We would then have participation which would make ancient Athens look like a police state. But with such a forum, the government would not be giving this country what it wants; it would be failing the Canadian people.

This country is changing and the government has to respond as best it can to these changes. There is in this country a growing sense of fairness, a growing openness, an increasing humanism, a growing respect for privacy, a growing concern for poverty, a growing distaste for militarism and a growing trend towards urbanization. The government has to meet this mood. Whatever good the

members of this house do in this chamber will not satisfy the Canadian people if the government of this country has not provided good administration and good laws.

The opposition has no such responsibility. Sometimes the opposition will propose a policy alternative; sometimes they will suggest improvements to legislation. I agree that the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) often has done this, but the opposition has no such responsibility. If the government fails to govern or governs badly until the next election, normally that is no reflection on the opposition.

As a result there are two perspectives on parliament. Parliament serves more than one function. To the government, it is part of the process by which its legislative proposals are enacted. To the opposition it is a place to criticize government administration and to let the public know about government failings. It is a place for proposing amendments, not so much to have them accepted but in the spirit of showing that if the opposition were the government the legislative proposals would have been perfect to begin with. This is fair enough, it is our system.

A dangerous proposition which the opposition has lately advanced is that when the opposition proposes legislative changes the government has to compromise in order to have its legislation passed. I am not referring to compromises relating to the rules, I am suggesting that the opposition argues for the right to effect compromise in the substantive legislation program. As one opposition member put it, "we must have freedom in this institution to express differences and resolve them", with the suggestion that resolving our differences might take longer than ten days in the case of what he called bad legislation.

I firmly agree and all hon. members surely agree that there should be freedom to express differences, but I dispute that such differences have to be resolved here. Canada's differences will never be resolved and should never be resolved. This country with its diversity—cultural, religious, regional and economic—can never be governed by consensus, and any effort to try can only lead to frustration and inaction. The search for consensus is one way in which the public is informed of the differences between the parties, but I would be suspicious that if consensus were obtained on this measure or on a great many measures, that it would mean that all the interests in the country and all diverse points of view were not being effectively represented here.