

*Procedure and Organization*

Your Honour. Therefore, I feel the opportunity to debate this committee report was not brought about by any real change of heart on the part of the government house leader.

It is a real tragedy, Mr. Speaker, that the first serious attempt of the Canadian parliament to arrive at a procedure for the allocation of time for debate of government legislation should be marred by the poisonous atmosphere that is being created in this chamber. This atmosphere is being generated by the way in which the government has sought to impose upon this house the proposed rule 75c.

This proposal, and this particular rule which gives the government house leader the unilateral right to seek an allocation of time, should be considered in light of the fact that the house, by general agreement, has already arrived at some very drastic limitations of time as distinct from allocation of time for debate. This has been done by mutual consent of members from all parties in this house working through our various procedural committees. I could give examples, and a number have already been mentioned in the course of this debate.

Very drastic changes have been made in the whole manner of dealing with supply, and also in the procedure for dealing with bills in standing committees. To anyone who has been in this house for any length of time, Mr. Speaker, these time restrictions cannot help but appear to be very drastic. Only a few years ago these time restrictions would have been opposed most vigorously by many members in different parts of the house.

This proposal for time allocation under rule 75c should also be considered in light of the fact that these various restrictions on time began in a minor way quite a few years ago with the fixing of time limits for speeches in certain debates, such as the address and budget debates. In addition, there was a limitation on the actual number of days to be allotted to these debates. All of these things which have been agreed to at various times by members of the opposition have restricted in a very drastic way the rights of private members to challenge the government which, after all, is the Crown in our midst.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the original function of parliament, as an institution, was to protect the people from the tyranny of the Crown. Many changes are necessary in these fast changing times. We required to consider and alter the techniques

under which parliament must operate. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we should never lose sight of the fact that the basic function of this institution is still to protect the people against tyranny.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that through careful consideration, and through arriving at a consensus on previous occasions concerning the manner in which our rules should be changed, we have kept pace with our times. We have arrived at techniques which make parliament a more effective institution. We have done the things which were necessary to restore the image of parliament in the minds of the Canadian people. We have done these things in a manner which, while it has placed some restrictions on private members, nevertheless has not altered our fundamental freedom to oppose tyranny as and when it may appear in our midst. I believe this should be the approach that hon. members should take when dealing with proposed changes to our rules.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The placing of the allocation of time into the category into which the government house leader has tried to put it is a result of a disregard for, and misunderstanding of the fundamental nature of parliament. I readily agree that it is not the fault of the government house leader that he was thrust into a position of power and responsibility in this house after serving only a relatively short period of time as a member of this institution. However, having been put in that position, he might have applied himself a little more to reaching an understanding of what parliament is all about, at least more than he has revealed so far in this debate and in some of the discussions antecedent to it.

In his speech this afternoon, the government house leader revealed the government's lack of understanding of what parliament is all about, and having allowed himself to accept responsibility for pushing this proposal forward he cannot absolve himself from blame for the situation in which we find ourselves. I submit that his argument this afternoon was specious on at least three counts, and I wish to deal briefly with each of them.

He made a lot about the number of items of government legislation that must be dealt with, and mentioned the fact that in a certain debate which took place not long ago one group in this house took up a fair amount of time discussing something about which they felt very strongly. The implication of his argument in this respect, seeking unilateral