

in but referred back to the committee with instructions that it have power to recommend that proposed standing order 16-A be amended to provide that a motion to accept the decision of the proceedings committee shall only be made following the unanimous decision of the proceedings committee arrived at during a meeting properly convened upon adequate written notice.

[English]

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would be less than fair if I did not say to the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Blair) that I congratulate him on that part of his speech, and it was the greater part, in which he described the changes that are proposed in the various reports our special committee is making to the House of Commons. No doubt he will recognize that I disagree with him in his interpretation of one or two significant provisions, but he made an excellent statement of the total picture that has been presented to parliament. To these remarks I must add my warm congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) on the important speech he has just made. My colleagues and I wish to associate ourselves with his defence of the rights of this free institution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Like others, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I believe that the rules of this house must be improved. We stand for parliamentary reform. Like the Leader of the Opposition, we do not think that improved rules are the final answer. We think in the long run that what really counts is the quality of debate, the nature of the legislation that is placed before us and the motives of those who take part in the work of this institution. If we are here to make a shambles of it we can do it no matter how good the rules are. If we are here to do the business of the people of Canada we can do that even if the rules are not as good as they might be. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we think that there are reforms that must be made.

In a brief aside in my remarks yesterday I possibly indicated the area in which we have to work the hardest. I said I found it interesting to read the words, reported back in 1876, of an hon. member who complained that the special committee on procedure of that year had not gone far enough. He said, "If we do not do something the sessions will get out of hand. Instead of our getting along with two month sessions they are going to last three months." That was back in 1876. Now our

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concern is to get 15 or 18 months of work done in the course of 12 calendar months. In other words, the area about which we have to concern ourselves most so far as reform is concerned is the area of time, how we use the 12 months of the year or how we use the time of the year that is available to us. Speeches I have made both inside and outside the House of Commons and articles I have written for newspapers and periodicals have concentrated on this issue. I know I am speaking for my colleagues in saying that one of the most important things we must accomplish in any revision of the rules of this house is the provision of machinery by which we can make the best use of our time. We are no longer a parliament concerned only with post offices, roads, customs tariffs and a few things like that. We are concerned with everything that affects our people from the cradle to the grave. We are concerned with problems from under the sea to outer space. The year is only 12 months long and we must cope with the problem of time.

Having said that I am advocate of parliamentary reform and having admitted that I think the major area where we must work is with respect to time, that seems to put me foursquare alongside the changes that our committee has recommended, since many of those changes are directed to solving the problems confronting us because there are only 12 months in the year. That is true. I am on the side of the most of the changes in the rules in the various reports that were presented to the house on Friday of last week. But when I recognize in those reports just one rule—never mind some of the others about which there might be some minor questions—which I regard as dangerous to the freedom of speech, as dangerous to the character of debate in this house and as dangerous to this institution itself, I have no option but to take the same stand that has been taken by the Leader of the Opposition. This rule must not be written into the standing orders of this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Let us, in our concern about planning the year and organizing our debates, not get the notion that somehow debate is a sin. Debate is not a sin, a mistake, an error or something to be put up with in parliament. Debate is the essence of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.