

*Extension of Sittings*

What is very disappointing is that the Conservatives have so quickly forgotten what it is like to be on this side of the House. It has not taken them very long to take on the demeanour of our friends to the right in the Liberal Party, to behave as the Liberals did for so many years.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Brewin:** I had them with me up until now, but I will get them back before we finish, Mr. Speaker. The reforms to the Standing Orders that were adopted, as I understand it, in 1985, represented a very delicate balance between the need for legislative efficiency and the need to ensure that the business of the House had full and careful consideration. That balance was agreed to on all sides of the House. These particular rules play a very important part of that balance.

First, it was the wisdom and experience of the House that evening sittings were not sittings which gave full and proper consideration to issues before the House. All sides agreed that in normal circumstances, in fact in all circumstances apart from closure, those evening sittings were to be done away with. Second, it agreed that there should be fixed times for the House to rise, and for it to rise during the Christmas season has obvious advantages. Not only are the Members themselves in need of and entitled to a break from the business of the House, but the public is obviously not focusing on the business of this House at this time of year. It made some sense, if the public was to play its part in consideration of the business of the House that we should not be dealing with business over the Christmas season.

● (1500)

Finally, the earlier rule about sending matters to smaller committees was clearly aimed at having full and detailed consideration of legislation, and particularly of complicated legislation. It enabled the House to call and to hear from witnesses who might conceivably contribute to the improvement of the legislation. These rules, as I understand them, were a compromise of interests and were designed to further the public interest. It is these rules which this motion proposes to do away with.

The Government proposes to do so for two stated reasons: first, to meet the alleged deadline that the Government sees it must set; second, because the Government says there has been enough discussion. The Hon. Member for Surrey—White Rock (Mr. Friesen) went on about the mandate the Government has. I certainly concede, as I understand all Hon. Members concede, that the Government has a mandate to

introduce legislation, to have it considered and ultimately to bring it to a vote, but the Government does not have a mandate to set aside these important and sensitive rules and to deprive the public—not the Opposition but the public—of its right to have the details of this legislation thoroughly and carefully reviewed.

I submit that the exercise of the election campaign will have changed significantly the perspectives of every single Member of this House on the details of this Bill. The election campaign may well not have changed the over-all view for or against the Free Trade Agreement, but none of us could have gone through this particular election campaign, this exciting and dramatic election campaign, this very intensive election campaign, without having learned something from the all-candidates meetings, without having learned something from the people we argued with on the doorsteps, without having learned something from the intense public debate of all aspects of this matter. We come, new Members and veterans, informed in a very special and sensitive way to this legislation.

I would like to think that if we had the opportunity carefully to go through this legislation clause by clause, using the committee system, if we had the opportunity to go through it, not during midnight sittings but fresh and during the day-to-day sittings, if we had the opportunity to go through it when the public was in a position to pay full attention, it is possible this legislation might be improved. It will not be ultimately defeated. The Government has a mandate for passing it, but it might be improved.

The specific concerns that we all heard and to which the Government responded at least in its advertising and public commitments, concerns about social programs, about the environment, about the impact on regional programs, about the dislocation of workers, might conceivably be met by changes in this legislation. Further, there may be very specific impacts of this legislation on the tourist business, for example, or on real estate. Various sections of the legislation or the appendices, if we had a full and proper opportunity, might be improved by a proper consideration of the legislation.

Now the Government is depriving the public of this opportunity. It does so for the second reason, this alleged deadline. I know many Hon. Members have spoken of the deadline, but let us remind the House through you, Mr. Speaker, that the deadline, the short time we have to consider this, is self-inflicted by the Government.