

Standing Orders

powers of the House to overrule the Speaker, and on the other hand it is instituting a power of the House to overrule the Speaker or to not have the Speaker's judgment involved at all.

Something else that I think should be brought to the attention of Canadians is this whole question of vote deferral. It has not been a controversial item. I see that the Whip from the Liberal Party is here. It gives the Whips the ability to defer a vote during the ringing of the bells. Remember, Madam Speaker, had this Standing Order been in place in 1979, Canadian history would have been different. The Government of the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark) would not have fallen. The vote on December 13, 1979, for which a number of us were present in the Chamber, would not have been taken. What are the implications of that proposal, particularly when we think about minority parliaments? I ask people to think about that. It means that whenever we have a vote, particularly a surprise vote, or even a vote which is not a surprise but the Whips are surprised by how few people there are for the non-surprise vote, there will be an ability to defer that vote. If there has not been an agreement which would keep the Government of the day in power, there will be at least 24 hours in which perhaps some kind of an agreement can be reached. That is the institutionalizing of bargaining time when it comes to minority governments. It is something I do not feel has received the attention it deserves.

The Government also proposes to extend the time for Government responses to committee reports. It wants 150 days. It needs over half a year to respond.

Mr. Merrithew: Over half a year is 150 days?

Mr. Blaikie: Well, almost a half year. One of the things which amazes me about the Canadian system of Government, and always has, is how slower we are to do anything than other countries. It does not take that long to respond to reports in Britain or in the United States. It seems that the Canadian bureaucracy has no equal in the slowness with which it is able to respond, particularly the bureaucracy of this Government.

What we have before us has the potential of bringing to an end what I think is a very significant period in the life of the House of Commons. I do not want to exaggerate, but the fact remains that if unilateral action is taken, it will go a long way towards damaging both the spirit and the letter of the reform, particularly as it affects the perception of the Speaker and the Parliamentary calendar.

Something else which ought to be receiving more attention than it is, is the amendment the Government wants to make to Standing Order 92(3), that committees meeting when the House is adjourned will meet according to a schedule set by the Chief Government Whip. I talked to a number of committee Chairmen who I think are pretty independent spirits, and they told me they are not really worried about it because they do not think the Government would use it to prevent their committees from meeting when they wanted to meet, or from investigating matters they had determined on their own they wanted to investigate. Nevertheless, the procedural possibility

will be there for committees to be frustrated by the scheduling authority, the Chief Government Whip, about to be instituted in the Standing Orders. I ask Hon. Members to think about that.

There are a number of other things which are, I suppose, sort of caretaking kind of amendments on the part of the Government, and which have not received much attention. I think they should be mentioned. For instance, the striking of committees is to be done in the fall at the beginning of the Parliamentary year instead of in January as it is now. The rule that they be struck in January arose out of the fact that, contrary to other Parliaments when committees were struck at the beginning of each session, with the Liberal Government of Prime Minister Trudeau we did not have sessions, we just had one ongoing, for ever and ever type of session. So we had to arrive at an arbitrary date for striking committees.

The Government now suggests that we do this in the fall and it is not a bad idea, except that if the Government is not going to take the Parliamentary calendar seriously, this measure may turn out to be just as arbitrary as anything else. It seems the Government wants to carry the sitting of the House through the summer so it can then have an excuse for not having Parliament sit in the fall when the free trade negotiations are coming to a head. It can then quietly sell-out the country without anyone being here in the Chamber to even ask a question. That may be what the Government is up to. Would it not be nice for the Government to be able to quietly sell away the country without the House of Commons being in session and without there being the opportunity for members of the Opposition to ask questions and to determine the exact nature of the sell-out?

● (1600)

In any event, I hope that as I am talking a deal is being worked out and that many of the things that I have said will become—

Mr. Cooper: You will have to apologize for.

Mr. Blaikie: I will not apologize for them. Just the very fact that we say them repeatedly has everything to do with why we might come to an agreement. If we do not come to an agreement it will be because the Government decided to act unilaterally when there was no real need to do so. What we have tried to do is bring the Government to its senses. We hope that that will happen very soon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate. I have been getting ready for this for some time now, and right at the outset I would tell the House that everything is not black in this Government proposal. Of course it includes new provisions which took us by surprise, but on the whole these are Standing Orders which must be endorsed, which must be made permanent because, in my judgment, in the past few years, two years at least, we have had a valid and enriching experience. It is a