

Extension of Sittings

Mr. Riis: It is appalling, undemocratic and it is certainly unparliamentary. We rejected strongly such a ludicrous request.

I want to say that the Government has not seen what a filibuster is all about. The Government might want to change the standing rules to suit its purposes. If the Conservatives don't like Question Period, I guess they will say Question Period is too aggravating. We may hear such things as: "We do not like the Standing Orders so we will change that as well". Because private Members are allowed 15 minutes a day to make statements about constituencies' concerns, I guess that too will be done away with. I can see the next change to the Standing Orders will be the suspension of the 10 months' sitting. The Conservatives may want only one or two weeks to bring in one big omnibus Bill and that will take care of the business of Canada.

That is not the kind of country we want. That is not the kind of country for which the legionnaires, 4,000 of them who are meeting in Ottawa today, fought. That is not the kind of government which those 4,000 legionnaires went overseas to defend. For those legionnaires in the gallery at the moment, I suspect they are thinking right now that here is a government prepared to rip up those freedoms for which they fought and is prepared to set aside the rules, traditions and fundamental practices of democracy for which we were prepared to die. That is what we are seeing today.

We are seeing a very negative spectacle when it comes to a democratic free country. That is why we say this particular motion is wrong. We accept the Speaker's decision. We must accept it. We will not rush the Chair or cause havoc in the House of Commons because we do not like the ruling. We will accept that. We have now moved the course of this place in a totally different direction where with a majority you can do anything you want. If you have the majority you can change any Standing Order you want, permanently, or simply suspend it. You can break any rule. You can throw out any tradition.

As I say, this is a dark day for our Parliament. It reminds me of the day back in October, 1980. It is not the kind of Canada most of us want to see. It is not the kind of Canada our constituents want to see. Our constituents have made it clear in every possible way that they want to see an election on this trade deal. They want an opportunity to participate in whether or not we should sign away our future to the United States. Canadians want to make that decision. In a democratic society, Madam Speaker, in a Parliament that says it believes in the democratic traditions, we ought to give the people of Canada that right and that opportunity. To do that, if necessary, we in the New Democratic Party, will do everything we can in our power to use the legitimate rules of Parliament to encourage the Government to live up to the free democratic traditions and principles that Canadians love and enjoy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Before the Hon. Member finishes his intervention, I would like to give the ruling on the preceding amendment which was moved earlier.

The Chair has found the amendment (Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques)) in order. The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, it is appropriate that you ruled on the amendment proposed by the Official Opposition. I thought to make the point and to indicate our concern at the way Parliament seems to be moving, I want to add an amendment to the amendment. It will read as follows. I move:

That the amendment be amended by deleting the period and adding the following therefor:

"and on that day the House shall stand adjourned at 3 p.m."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Questions and comments.

● (1640)

Mr. de Jong: Madam Speaker, first I wish to commend my colleague for an excellent address on the question of suspending the Standing Orders. It seems to me that in a parliamentary democracy it is the accepted practices, built up over the sittings and the years, that really constitute the essence of our democracy. It seems to me that when the Government suspends the rules of the House it sets a very dangerous precedent. As I think my House Leader pointed out, if you start suspending the rules today on these particular issues, what comes next? You begin to suspend them with respect to Question Period, with respect to how Bills are moved through the House, indeed how the House governs itself.

What the Government is doing today is setting a precedent. What will stop some future Government from using that precedent and doing exactly the same thing? Once the Government, any Government, starts down that road, future Governments will use it as a precedent to be employed in other situations. Once you start down that road, it continues and continues and our Standing Orders, the rules under which we govern ourselves, are no longer meaningful. It is the precedent that it sets that creates a new standard, a new way in which Governments can deal with the Opposition and subvert Parliament. My House Leader said that not since the 1800s has a Government used this ploy of suspending the Standing Orders. We were fortunate that it did not become a practice.

Surely what the Government is doing today is demonstrating that even with its massive majority it cannot set its agenda and pass its legislation within the established rules. It must therefore suspend those rules. Surely this is a very dangerous precedent. Surely Conservative Members who cherish the traditions of the British parliamentary procedure must feel extremely uncomfortable with what their own Government is doing.

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to respond to my hon. colleague who of course raises the fundamental question before us today, where does this take us? What is the next step?