

Government Orders

If television coverage of House committees comes, I will welcome that. But I hope that this government will not be authoritarian and will allow the media to decide which committee meeting will be covered. If we give that decision to politicians on the government side or on any side, we are looking for trouble.

Right now, when the newspapers want to cover a particular story in committee, they make the decision. We do not do that. There should be no difference when it comes to television coverage.

I also want to say that I am concerned about these changes because I think their main thrust is to limit debate. One of my concerns is that these changes are going to backfire from this point of view; they will increase public cynicism. Take, for example, the proposal of three weeks on and one week off. There will be a lot of Canadians who will identify the one week off as some kind of a break, some kind of a holiday. You and I know that that is not going to be true. But I am afraid it is going to contribute to cynicism. It is going to contribute to that very jaundiced, negative view that people have of this particular House.

I would like to ask the hon. minister a question. It has to do with these proposed rules changes and with the failure to deal with legislative planning.

As someone who was elected for the first time in 1988, I find it offensive the way the House works when it comes to planning legislation. I know the Liberals did it when they were in power and the Tories do it now that they are in power: Never give the opposition one extra moment to prepare; drop something on their desks 15 minutes before it happens, an hour before it happens, maybe sometimes a day, sometimes two. To me, that is not planning, and that is not a way to run a House. It is not a way to run Parliament.

My question of the hon. minister is this: Does he not recognize that this was a failure and that there has to be a lot more work done to allow for legislative planning?

• (1740)

Mr. Danis: I agree with my hon. friend that there should be more time for planning legislation. I just wish that he could attend some of the weekly meetings we have with the House leaders, the deputy House leaders, and the whips to see how hard the government House

leader tries to get the co-operation of the opposition to do exactly what the hon. member suggests.

My reply to the hon. member would be to talk to his House leader. We are certainly ready to co-operate. We have tried many times, but we have been unable to do so and certainly not through lack of co-operation on the part of the government House leader. We know how flexible the government House leader is. He has been trying to co-operate.

The hon. member made two other comments. I am glad that he supports our rule changes which will have the effect of more TV coverage in committees. I certainly thank him for that. He has made negative comments with regard to the three weeks and one week. He knows as well as I do that when we consider the total number of hours they will be the same.

However, if I could speak for myself on that issue, I represent a riding in the province of Quebec which was one of the seven ridings that voted yes in the Quebec referendum on separation. There were only seven in the whole province. I also have MNAs who all represent the Parti Quebecois. They are trying to win their election and ensure that Quebec separates. The people in Quebec City sit, at most, six months a year from Tuesday afternoon—

Mr. Prud'homme: Four months.

Mr. Danis: The hon. member for Saint-Denis mentions four months. It is about that but certainly not more than six months a year. They sit from Tuesday at noon until Thursday at noon. The rest of the time they are in their ridings trying to make sure that Quebec separates. In the meantime under our system I have to be here five days a week all the time, from Labour Day to the end of June. I support the three weeks and one week. It will at least give me one week in the month where I can fight for Canada in my riding.

That is what I want to do, and that is why I support the change.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I have a few words to say on this subject we are debating. Just to remind the House and those who may be watching, we are debating some pretty far-reaching changes to the way we do our business here and the extent to which we will be able to do our business once the government rams this through.