

Government Orders

What is going to happen, Mr. Speaker, if these rule changes pass? There are a number of scenarios. You are in for three weeks and you are off for one. Members of Parliament are in their constituencies. They come to Ottawa. We have an extra hour of debate every day on government business. We have sessions on Wednesday. We have a committee system which is quite different. Some changes have evolved there.

Do you think committees are going to be sitting those three weeks, Mr. Speaker? Do you honestly believe that those standing committees of the House of Commons are going to sit on a regular basis?

• (1740)

I would venture to say that they will be scheduled to sit, but because of other demands, because members are being circumvented in terms of making presentations here before the House of Commons, we will have very little opportunity to participate in meaningful ways in committees. That is not to suggest that they will never meet. They will meet. There is no question about that. But what will be flawed, is: do not meet tonight, do not meet tomorrow, you can meet while you have the week off. So the three weeks are up. You have the week off to be in your constituency, or you can be in a committee in Ottawa. You know what is going to happen. Members will have to go back to their constituencies because they will tell people for three weeks that they have to be in Ottawa but they have a week off and will be back.

Where does the committee work go? Where does the examination of the estimates end up? Will there be a focus in committee? Some, yes, but perhaps for many, no. Members will be torn, they will be torn: stay in Ottawa, participate on special committees, legislative committees, standing committees, or go back to their constituencies because they have been told by the government that is the week you spend in your constituency so that you can listen to your constituents.

It all fits. It is just like putting your hand into a leather glove. The scenario is very, very smart, if you want to choke off debate in Parliament, if you want to provide less time for ministers of the Crown to be accountable to the opposition parties and to the national media and to the interest groups across this country, less time for

those of us in opposition to be the public watchdog as to what is taking place with regard to the government activities of the day; less debate on the budget; fewer opposition days; less debate on the Speech from the Throne; less opportunities with regard to second reading on a particular piece of legislation; less opportunity to speak on third reading of a particular bill; a more effective—if you will—time allocation rule for the government, not the opposition; committees which will meet or may not meet.

It is a pretty neat, sophisticated package. A neat package for a government that is in political trouble. I say to members opposite: "This will not save you. What will save you in the next election is if you were to listen to the Canadian people".

Members who are here with me today make the point that it is too late. It is too late for members opposite to change their ways, to correct their sins of the past. But perhaps they ought to try. Perhaps they ought to try to do the democratic thing that they talked so much about from 1984 to 1988. Perhaps they ought to try to give members of Parliament greater latitude in discussing the various issues of the day. My colleague, the member for Kingston and the Islands, and I think other members, have alluded to the government that not every motion that comes before the House has to be a non-confidence motion on every occasion. We understand the realities of quorum and people, et cetera, being here. We could accommodate that. But they do not want to hear that. They believe that just by getting back to their constituencies for that week, that will be able to resolve their political difficulties. I am afraid they will be sadly disappointed after the next federal election when the hon. Jean Chrétien and the Liberal Party of Canada become the governing party in this country.

Mr. Hockin: I doubt that.

Mr. Dingwall: Hon. members say they doubt that. Perhaps if they are true to their conviction, and I see the minister for small business who has particular responsibilities in an area that I represent in the Parliament of Canada, and I say this in a kind of shy way because I am kind of shy, but if the minister really believes that his policies are so good, if he really, really believes that his privileged status as a minister of the Crown has endeared