

*Government Orders*

Mr. Speaker, the proposed reduction of 40 days includes reductions in the days for debating the budget and the speech from the Throne, two extremely important subjects for all Canadians.

First, the government asks the opposition to give up two of the six days for debating the budget. As we know, the budget is one of the most important means at the government's disposal for revealing its economic and social policies. The budget statement tells the people the general economic policy that the government intends to pursue.

Mr. Speaker, that is how important the budget statement is. It is regrettable that the motion before this House proposes reducing the number of days to debate the government's general economic policy from six, as it is now, to four. We believe that four days of debate on the government's economic and social policy is not enough. The budget shows us not only the economic policy that the government intends to take but it also brings in tax changes that take effect immediately after it is presented. So the budget affects Canadians immediately after it is presented through the many tax changes in it. It deserves more than 3 per cent of the sitting days.

Mr. Speaker, in 1985, when the budget was presented and deindexed old age security pensions, by raising questions in the House and debating the budget we succeeded. That is how important Parliament's role is. It is at a time like this that we are reminded of the importance of Parliament and of being here to debate current issues. It is in this Parliament that we made the public aware of the unfairness of the government action. People came down here and demonstrated in support of the Opposition and the government had to do an about-face. As a result, we still have indexed old age security pensions. That is why it is important to debate the economic and social statement contained in the government budget and to have enough time to do it.

Once again, the government is restricting the capacity of the elected members to make it accountable to the people. A government that restricts the capacity of the Opposition to question its actions is a government incapable to defend itself, a government that has failed and that should step down.

This becomes even more obvious if we look at the effect of the reduction in the number of sitting days on the oral question period. As I said earlier, it is because of question period that the government had to change a social and economic policy, set out in the budget in 1985, which would have adversely affected senior citizens in Canada. So, it is important, because we must remember

that cutting 40 sitting days takes away 40 question periods. Given the number of questions asked daily, the government may have 300 to 400 fewer questions to answer every year. Let us not forget either the number of ministers who had to resign because of questions asked during question period over the six and a half years this government have been in power.

So, not only does the government want to reduce the number of days when questions can be asked during question period, but it is also trying in a way to cover up its unreliability.

Another important point I would like to make has to do with the restructuring of the House of Commons committees. The motion before us calls for a structure in which the standing committees would be grouped into five envelopes, each of which would include several standing committees and two legislative committees. This new structure would report to and be administered by a new standing committee called Standing Committee on House Management. The proposed structure, Mr. Speaker, will require a high degree of co-operation from all the parties represented in this House. As you know, it will be difficult at times to have an inspiring atmosphere of cooperation and trust, considering the difficulties our country is now going through.

Members of Parliament are aware that, since last September, the normal workings of our committees are impaired. You can ask members of all three parties, and even independent members, how many committees have been sitting since September. There are always excuses and, under the control of the government majority, there are no sittings. For example, the government was forced to designate some chairmen because there had been some resignations, but the government did not want to replace them as this was providing an excuse for not sitting. So, that explains the situation we are now experiencing.

In order to create a climate of trust, I wish all members of Parliament will do their best to ensure that this type of event will not recur. To that end, Mr. Speaker, we will need a lot of co-operation—and that is my worst concern. I personally see two reasons why co-operation will be required for this committee restructuring. First, this new Committee on House Management will apparently have great powers and plenty of work. As a consequence of the government proposal, the Committee on House Management will have many responsibilities and we, the Liberal members, think there is a risk that it won't be efficient, precisely because of that heavy workload. That, does not match our definition of efficiency.