

*Government Orders*

The government House leader, as usual, misreads Canadians and public opinion. What Canadians want is better leadership from the government. They are indeed tired of empty promises and secret deals and dice-throwers. That we agree with, but it is time we saw some leadership over there and less of this nonsense about people wanting to see their members in their ridings.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you from having been elected six times to this House that if you are not in your riding, and if you do not work, you do not get re-elected by the community. I would hope that most members here have that experience, that if you work, you get elected. If you do not work, you do not get elected. It is a heck of a privilege to represent 100,000 people as I do in Ottawa—Vanier, and I take it very seriously.

I do not think it improves my work in my riding, which fortunately happens to be close to this place, by saying to me that members of Parliament are demeaning Parliament by having adversarial debates. That is what debate is all about.

The proposals for change were put to the opposition in January of this year. Just to rectify some of the facts that were put to the House yesterday by the House leader, he said we have been dealing for a year with these proposals. That is nonsense. They were put to me as House leader of the opposition in January 1991, and I immediately circulated them to the members of my caucus for their consideration.

This battle is not for show. This battle is because we oppose the suggested changes, because we believe they will not rekindle public faith in Parliament. Possibly less partisanship as we saw this morning by the government Whip would help. I could agree with that. Possibly a little less gagging of Parliament. This is the government that in five years used the gag 34 times. Unbelievable.

The government is proposing to reduce the time of the opposition that represents the views of the millions of Canadians who may not always agree with government policy. They want to shorten the number of sitting days from 175 to 134 days. They are cutting many of the days of the Official Opposition, traditionally used to voice the concerns of our constituents in this House on the 25 or so days a year that the opposition has at its disposal to call the debate on a supply day of the government.

*[Translation]*

By cutting 41 sittings days, the government is sparing itself 41 question periods. Perhaps that will be an improvement, but I do not think it will change anything. It might do a little more to put to sleep the media concerned only with question period, this daily 45-minute exercise in partisanship, those who are not interested in following the proceedings of the House the rest of the time and who never or seldom attend committee sittings to see what is being done there, where in fact the bulk of the work is done by responsible members working on legislation, bills and reports referred for their consideration. No one talks about that, Mr. Speaker. Heaven forbid! During these 45 minutes when there can be a run-in between two members, if it is funny, they will laugh, but, if it is dull, if the opposition does not bring it off they will say that the opposition is not with it.

I wonder, if the cynicism—I am not sure this is the most appropriate term—that colours the media's perception of this Parliament and the House of Commons, is not indeed a serious cause for concern.

The government limits to 15 minutes per day the time allotted to presenting petitions from the Canadian people. This limit is pointless, considering the fact that petitions have taken on average 8 minutes per day over the past two years. Now the government wants to reduce it to 15 minutes. I fail to understand!

These petitions are drafted, circulated, signed and sent to be tabled in this House by Canadians from all walks of life, rich, poor, interested in politics or not. Petitions are a legitimate, legal and democratic means by which the ordinary citizen can make his opinion known on a matter that concerns him.

The government wants to reduce from 8 to 6 days the number of days to debate the throne speech. However, over the past two years, only 27 of the 1,611 hours of debate were spent to debate the throne speech. Yet, it is important. It sets the course for the opening session and indicates the direction the government intends to take. The members, both on the opposition side and the government side, find it important to take part in this debate, because it gives them the opportunity to address various subjects of interest to their riding.