

(6) No debate shall be permitted on the report but a petition referred to therein may be read by the Clerk of the House at the Table, if required."—The Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying when the House rose at one o'clock, the current rules of the House are stacked in favour of the Government. Even the most determined Opposition cannot, when day is done, totally stop the Government from obtaining passage of its legislation unless of course public opinion is raised against it to such an extent that the Government itself cannot ignore it. I was using as an example of that the way public opinion, together with the efforts of the opposition Parties, caused the Government to back down from its totally wrong attempt to cut the old age pension.

We can and on occasion must make the passage of legislation that we deem objectionable a difficult process. However, in doing so, we carry out a role essential in a democracy and we are also making sure that the views of the public are heard and hopefully are considered by the Government of the day. Similarly, when we perceive that the Government is acting contrary to the public interest, we must have devices by which we can put pressure on the Government or at least demonstrate to the public the Government's misconduct.

Never in this Parliament has this Opposition abused the extremely limited rules available to it for these purposes. Indeed, in agreeing to the provisional rules, we even gave up the device that, in the minds of many, had been abused by the Opposition before the last election, and I am talking about the tactic of bell ringing.

I also want to reiterate how important it is for all Members of the House that the rules of the House continue to say without change or derogation that this House operates on a fixed calendar. This was one of the great, important and fundamental reforms that came into effect in 1982, and I want to say again, contrary to what is one of the purposes of the motion before us, that fundamental aspect of our rules should not be swept aside just because a government has not been able to manage properly or effectively its legislative program and is therefore not able to get completed as much of that program as it would like within a particular legislative period. Those portions of the rules stipulating that we sit according to a fixed calendar are as much a part of our rules and Standing Orders as the provisions for a daily Question Period, as the provisions for three readings of Bills, and as the provisions for taking votes in connection with the making of decisions on Bills.

I submit that in the motion before us, the Government is making an unseemly, unjustified and unreasonable power grab which is not, in the long run, in the interests of either side of the House or, more importantly, in the interests of our country. We in the Official Opposition oppose this power grab and will do so with all our vigour.

The Government must realize that in spite of its current parliamentary majority, this is not a one-Party state. The parliamentary majority of the Government has not made this country into a one-Party state. The House has not become an

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appendage of the Government. It does not belong to the Government. The Government's majority has not turned this House into nothing more than an instrument of the Government's will. The House of Commons belongs to all the Members elected to it and to all the Parties represented in it. Therefore, it belongs ultimately not to the Government but to the Canadian people.

What the Government is trying to do with this motion is completely unacceptable to the Official Opposition, and it breaks the long tradition of changing the rules and procedures of this House on the basis of consensus. In the meantime, we do believe it would be wrong at this time to abandon the current experiment in parliamentary reform altogether. Regrettably, the Government's ill-advised initiative makes fine tuning of the interim rules difficult at this point in time, but with a view toward salvaging at least the progress made so far, I conclude by moving, seconded by the Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier):

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the first semicolon and by substituting the following: "and

That the Clerk of the House be authorized and instructed to print a revised edition of the Standing Orders of the House, renumbering as may be deemed necessary and making such technical and consequential changes as may be required."

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): With permission from Hon. Members, the Chair would like to take under advisement the amendment that has just been tabled by the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray), and in the meantime, to pursue the debate by recognizing the Hon. Member from the third party. I recognize the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

[*English*]

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Madam Speaker, this is a very dark day for parliamentary democracy. It is a very bleak day for Canada's Parliament. We are forced to debate a motion that the Government introduced in a roundabout way to change the rules of the House of Commons. It is a unilateral, dictatorial, we know best, big brother approach to Parliament. It says the Progressive Conservative Party forming the Government of Canada knows what is best for the country. It knows how a Government of Canada ought to proceed with changing the rules of the House of Commons.

It is very important to recognize, as you do from your chair, that you are a servant of this House, Madam Speaker. You are as much a servant of opposition Members as you are a servant of government Members. You serve all Members of the House on an equal, fair and just basis. So, too, do the rules and regulations and traditions and procedures of the House of Commons serve all Members. They are not in place to provide service to the Government only, to enable it only to facilitate its business.