

*Government Orders*

The present system was adopted in 1960. In recent years governments have drifted away from annual sessions with a result that the present government has now been in office for almost seven years but has permitted the completion of only three address debates.

Thus for years on end members have been deprived of this valuable opportunity to air the issues that concern their electors. Consequently they have been forced to seek other vehicles for putting these matters before the House and there has been a somewhat disruptive effect on the conduct of other business.

Now the government seeks to further institutionalize the reduction of this valuable time, an action that seems likely only to institutionalize the consequences for the length and tone of other debates.

So I ask the government: Where is the rationale, where is the thinking if you want members to go back to their constituencies, meet with their electors, listen to what they have to say but then be denied the right to come to Parliament and to express their views, or a particular view? Where is the logic? There is no logic, none whatsoever.

Similarly, the government proposes to abbreviate the budget debate by two days. In the 19th century there was no formal budget debate. The Minister of Finance made his annual financial statement either on a motion to go into the committee of ways or means or in a committee of ways and means or of supply.

After 1912 the statement was always made on a motion to go into committee of ways and means. There was great reluctance by the House to limit the length of the budget debate since taxation is so fundamental to the role of Parliament. In 1955 the debate was limited to eight days and this was reduced to six in 1960.

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I wish to underline that. The rationale for limiting this debate on the general budgetary policy was that there would still be ample opportunity to debate the specifics in considering the various bills emanating from the budget. I will come to that very briefly.

In 1968, debate on specific ways and means motions was eliminated and the committee on ways and means was abolished. Thenceforth, the six-day budget debate

has been on a motion: "That the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government."

Tax measures cannot be introduced until this general debate is completed, and until 1985 the committee stage of tax bills had to be in a Committee of the Whole. The insistence of the government in 1985 that tax bills be referred to a standing or legislative committee further eroded the focus of the House as a whole on these fundamental fiscal issues.

Now the government is proposing a further reduction in the time the House may spend on its fiscal policies. It not only proposes to reduce the budget date by two days, it also proposes automatic closure after two days debate on any budget-related bill that increases the government's borrowing authority. This is another unacceptable abridgement of Parliament's fundamental role.

Again, I come back to my point. Spend more time with your constituents, yes, but why on the other hand do you want to deprive hard-working members of Parliament—and let us take a minute or two here. There are numerous members of Parliament in all political parties who work very hard, diligently on behalf of their constituents, who do not ask their electors what political partisanship or party they belong to. They represent them all, in most instances very well. And now you say to those members of Parliament in the Throne Speech, you are going to slap two days off; on the budget debate, slap two days off; opposition days you are going to cut to five.

To the casual observer it does not mean anything, it is just a few days off. But we represent people, live people in all regions of this country, and they have particular views and concerns that only members of Parliament who are aware of them can present in a sound, reasonable and rational way.

The government is not content with the abbreviation of the three so-called set pieces, namely the address, the business of supply, and the budget. It is demanding new, more Draconian rules to limit debate on other legislation as well. So it just does not stop there, it goes well beyond.

When the House decided in 1968 that most bills should be referred after second reading to a standing committee rather than to a Committee of the Whole, it was thought that the second reading stage might be treated by members with somewhat less urgency, that many members might prefer to wait until third reading stage when the bill was in its final form before participating in the debate. That did not prove to be the case. Second