

First of all, with respect to the calendar, as I said the other day, there are good arguments on both sides. One argument is whether or not members should have a week in their ridings when the House is not sitting on a periodic basis, particularly for those who have long distances and for all of us who have had the experience of setting up things in the riding and then having to cancel them or to come back because of some event here. I can certainly see advantages in that. I do not think that should be the main focus of the debate. There are other things going on here which are more important.

• (1610)

The government, by moving to make the process for getting legislation through the House much more efficient, to use their description of what they are doing, has gone overboard. It is common among lawyers to say that hard cases make bad law. I think that the government, out of fear of what might be done by independents or the Bloc Quebecois or the Reform Party or whatever, has moved to change the unanimous consent provisions in a way that all of us will come to regret and which certainly goes against the spirit of the McGrath committee which set out to increase the power of private members. This certainly takes away the power of the private member or members, unless they number 25, to get in the way of the government steamroller, should the government want to use this provision to put legislation through in one heck of a hurry.

At the time we all agreed with the McGrath committee that delay is not necessarily a bad thing. Delay is one of the features and functions of parliamentary democracy. This is something that the public does not always understand. Oppositions, when they try to delay things, are not always just sort of puffing and huffing and blowing off steam. They are providing crucial political time for the public to mobilize against something which they may or may not regard as something they want to oppose. Oppositions provide that time. Sometimes we provide a few days and then we see that people are not interested and we say: "All right, time to move on". Sometimes when we provide a few days' delay, we find out that people are really angry when they hear what is happening, so we provide a few more days. Sometimes we provide weeks. That is how the system works. There is nothing wrong with that. It irritates governments, but that is one of the ways in which parliamentary democracy works.

The role the opposition can play is sometimes underestimated by the public. Sometimes we delay things and people are not interested, so be it. Other times that

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function of delay has been very, very critical. The government, by moving to even further expedite the legislative process, on top of what was done in 1969, 1983 and 1985 and not putting it in the context of a package in which the opposition receives other powers, I think leaves itself open to some of the charges that have been made against it which they find so offensive.

If they want to make this place more efficient, then at the same time they have to introduce more real power and real meaning into what we do here when we are here. That they have not done. If they were to do that, then it might be the case that the killing of time and the use of delay as a primary parliamentary function would not be so absolutely crucial to the role of opposition, if there was more meaningful input. But that they have not provided in this particular reform.

This reform, had we tried to go ahead and make a real package, could have dealt with some of the things that are really frustrating people here. That is the way that Question Period has deteriorated and the way that everything we do here seems to be very, very selectively filtered out to the public.

There was a lot of talk about TV. One member said that TV does not lie and others said that the TV shows up people for what they are. I think that TV does lie. I think that TV, as a medium, does lie in the sense that it does not completely reveal all that goes on here. Maybe TV does not lie if you are one of those people who may be watching now, who has the time to watch the parliamentary channel all the time. But if you only watch those things which make it into the news from Parliament, then the TV does lie about what goes on in Parliament.

The hon. member from Annapolis Valley—Hants said that people are sick to death of the partisan bickering. Well, it is no wonder. That is the only thing that makes it on the news. You could get up here day after day after day and ask substantive, non-partisan, meritorious questions and the only thing you would be guaranteed is a life of absolute obscurity. Nine times out of ten, the cheap shot, the partisan remark, the lowest form of political activity will be what is selected out for that 15 or 30 second sound byte on the news. I think that is part of the problem here and we need to examine that. So I have some of the anxieties that the member for Annapolis Valley—Hants has about TV in committees. Maybe it will have the meritorious effect that the member for Vancouver North spoke about, but maybe it will not. I guess the only way we are going to find out is to bring it in.