

Supply

● (1700)

We have been accused of flouting the parliamentary tradition. Mr. Speaker, what is the legitimate role of the Opposition? On March 2 of last year it set the bells ringing for 14 days and 22 hours. On March 9 of this year the bells rang for seven hours and 40 minutes; on May 10, for 13 hours and 45 minutes; on May 17, for five hours and 54 minutes; on May 24, for over three hours. Is that the parliamentary tradition? I do not believe anyone who is trying to be objective about what legitimate parliamentary tactics are would defend that as falling within parliamentary tradition.

At Westminster, in the British House of Commons, which is the mother of Parliament, when the bell starts ringing it rings for eight minutes. It rings for eight minutes in the mother of Parliament, and here it rings for 14 days. Who was it that raised during the Constitution debate over 100 spurious and specious points of order and questions of privilege? It was not the Government, it was the Official Opposition. That sort of thing is unheard of at Westminster. That is not within the parliamentary tradition. I believe that the end result of these tactics has been a divisive House and bitter debates. I feel that to analyse it and attribute it all to this side of the House in a tirade such as we heard from the Hon. Member for the Yukon is not coming to grips with the problems at all; it is simply fanning the flames to make them worse.

I happen to feel that one of the biggest problems we have in this Parliament is the inability of the Government to get a reasonable legislative program through the House. What happened when we entered into the recent interim trial on reforms of the Standing Orders? This side of the House entered into those reforms in a spirit of good faith. There are a number of changes in there which could prove quite difficult and tricky for a Government. I am referring to something like the changes in Standing Order 69, Subsection 3, which obliges the Government within 120 days to report in response to a report from a committee. I believe that is a good experiment but that it can be tricky for a Government. It can be awkward and embarrassing for a Government. Notwithstanding that, we entered into that agreement.

Standing Order 46, Subsection 4, automatically refers annual reports, which are obliged to be tabled with the House, to standing committees for scrutiny, so you can get the bureaucrats and the senior mandarins in any Department before committee and ask them questions on policy formulation. I happen to feel that is a good thing, regardless of who is in power. The point I am trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that we have entered into some of these changes.

Another experiment is changing Wednesdays so as to give an entire day to Private Members' Business. The end result of that is that there are only four days a week—and when you consider all the supply days, we are really only talking about three days a week—in which we can deal with Government business. There are disadvantages to that for the Government. I believe for Parliament as a whole it may well be an improvement. However, we entered into all of these things and,

hopefully, we were going to try to get a spirit in which the legislative program of the Government would move along with some degree of reason. What happened was that instead of that being the case, we have found even more obstruction and more filibustering in recent Bills than had occurred before.

Let me go back to the period prior to the changes in the Standing Orders and look at some of the Bills. On Bill C-48 we spent six days. On Bill C-54 we spent six days. On Bill C-58 we spent five days. On Bill C-89 we spent eight days. This was all at second reading stage. That was before the experiment. We wanted a legislative timetable. In October of last fall the Government House Leader wrote the Opposition and gave it what our proposed schedule of legislation was for the fall session. In January of this year the Government House Leader wrote the Opposition and set out what was going to be a reasonable legislative timetable. In March he did the same thing with regard to a spring timetable. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there has not been any meaningful effort on the part of the Official Opposition to come to some agreement with regard to a timetable.

The New Democratic Party, by and large, with the exception of the Crow Bill, has been pretty responsible and reasonable, but not the Official Opposition. What has happened since the experiment? Let us look at three very recent Bills, and I am referring to Bill C-139, Bill C-143 and Bill C-151.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Which ones are they?

Mr. Smith: These are the two borrowing authority Bills and also the amendments to the Income Tax Act. Of course, those who are familiar with parliamentary practice know that second reading is debate of a Bill in general principle. In Westminster, the mother of Parliament, second reading debates take one day. It does not have an automatic adjournment hour and often there is not a vote until the wee hours of the night, but it takes one day. On Bill C-139, at second reading, there were 102 speeches; there were nine Government speeches and 75 Conservative speeches. No reasonable person could deny that that was a filibuster. There were 17 speeches from the New Democratic Party and one speech from the Independent Member. On Bill C-143 there were over ten speeches on a point of order introduced by the Hon. Member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) before the Bill was even introduced. When we got to the Bill there were 114 Tory speeches, 31 Government speeches and 32 New Democratic Party Speeches, for a total of 187 speeches.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): You are trying to gag Parliament.

Mr. Smith: On Bill C-151 there were three Government speakers, and 54 Conservative speakers—54—and we are accused of flouting parliamentary tradition! There were 15 New Democratic Party speeches. There was a total of 72 speeches, of which we on this side provided three, and there were 54 Conservative speeches. Who is being unparliamentary?