

One thing that concerns me as a new member of Parliament is that all of us, for whatever reason, want to reinvent laws, rules and regulations.

I will come to my question. I want to make a quick preamble here.

General Robert made rules. We have a book of rules here and there are other things. I come from a municipal council where we stopped reading bylaws simply because what happened in the old days was that some people could not read. Sometimes they only had one written part and one had to read those things clause by clause. Now we have the electronic media and we have to fine tune it. That is what the government is trying to do.

What bothers me in this place both with the committee work and with its rules and regulations and talking about laws is that we are spinning our wheels. We spend a lot of time at it. Somehow members of Parliament always want to do something and they think doing something is changing the rules. I know that rules are for making something happen.

I want to ask the member for Ottawa West, how do we reconcile the permanent government, which is the civil service, integrating with the rules and regulations we have? We make a rule in committee, and it has been done before. I have seen this kind of thing as a mayor when six members of council asked the administrator to do six different jobs. They spin their wheels and never get anything done.

How do we reconcile making a committee function properly with the civil servants who are there? How could we make that better by using these kinds of rules?

• (1800)

Mrs. Catterall: This dilemma is not easy and I think the hon. member knows that the permanent public service as he calls it can be very resistant to change if it does not agree with it at first. Let me tell the hon. member what I have seen over the five years I have been here and how I think it has to change.

I have seen officials come before committees as they are required to do to defend the position the government has put forward. Unfortunately that position has often been developed in the secrecy of cabinet without the open consultation and discussion we are talking about here.

When we say we are going to send the concept of a bill to a committee for discussion so that the committee can consult with and hear the views of people who will be affected by the issue, that leaves our officials freer to bring forward options for a committee to consider. That is going to be a change for them. It is going to take some time for them to understand they are not defending a particular position and that they are free to advise the committee on options and on the implications of those options.

Government Orders

It also means that members of Parliament must have a new relationship of respect and trust with the public service. It is not the defender of the government now. It is working with members of Parliament and the committee to help make a good bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell there are three people left to speak. We have 22 minutes. I wonder if there would be a disposition to give eight minutes to each of the members and not have questions and comments. Is that agreeable? I take it it is not agreeable to do it that way and I call on the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure this afternoon to have the opportunity to speak on the motion before the House to amend our rules.

We are amending the rules pursuant to a commitment made by our party during the last election campaign when we put out a program to Canadians. They voted for that program which included a number of things on Parliament. It mentioned allowing more free votes, giving MPs a greater role in drafting legislation, giving more power to House of Commons committees and involving the public in consultation before important legislation was introduced.

Many of these issues have been done already. The others are in the motion we are debating today. That is what it is all about. This is part of the program I and all Liberal candidates stood for in the last election campaign.

I want to advance the proposition to all members today that it is untrue to state at the present time there are no free votes. As a matter of fact a very successful argument can be made that all votes in this Parliament are free. I say it for the following reason and I am not saying we do not need to improve our system. After all we are proposing to do just that today.

Nevertheless as a member of Parliament I have the power to make an accusation against any citizen of Canada in this House and I could never be sued in a court of law for saying it. I have the ultimate freedom in this Chamber on behalf of the people who sent me here to say anything, anything at all. I, though, must live with the consequences of that which I say in this House once I leave this House. Nevertheless, I still have that freedom. I as a member of Parliament together with my colleagues have the freedom to defeat my government in a non-confidence motion.

Did the people of the United States have a tool like that in the Watergate scandal? Do they not wish they had had something like that? The process for getting rid of a president that country no longer wanted and Congress no longer wanted dragged on for months and months before the United States Congress. It would take about six minutes to do that in the House of Commons today.