

*Government Orders*

entire 12 years, felt by members on both sides of the House on a personal basis, it was that the Standing Orders of the House were not satisfactory. When I arrived, in 1979, some of the strongest critics of the rules were members of my party on the government side then and when we were in opposition, individual Liberal members were unhappy with the Standing Orders because the Standing Orders were outmoded. I therefore want to commend the members who participated in the process to change these Standing Orders. The House leaders from all three parties played a very valuable role for which they should individually be commended.

There is an outline set forth as to the discussions they had. They were very detailed discussions; proposal after proposal to change the rules. The package we are debating today reflects the negotiation that took place. One does not get everything one wants. The government certainly had to back down on many things and the opposition did not get everything it wanted either.

The point is that at some point the House has to decide. I can remember the grand experiment in 1980 tried to give individual members more authority, more say in what happens in this House by developing task forces. As a relatively new member then in opposition, I had the privilege of sitting on a federal—provincial finance task force. We crossed the country and heard evidence from all sorts of provinces and of witnesses. We made a unanimous report and many of the provisions of that report have now worked their way into the substantive law of the nation. I sat on one on Senate reform and we had some very creative ideas that came to us from Canadians and which we incorporated into our report. They are gradually being seen as more and more sensible as time goes by, and I think will become part of the next change of the Senate when that change occurs.

In 1984 the McGrath committee made substantial recommendations which were adopted by the House and which I think have benefitted the House in terms of the standing committees and the legislative committees.

Having had more experience with those, having identified more weaknesses and needs for change, we have this package before us today which represents a detailed negotiation flowing out of the practical, real-life experiences we have had as members.

I recognize the reality and I would not expect the opposition members to stand up and vote for this because when you are in opposition, and we used to do the very same thing, it often is in your best interest to negotiate changes behind closed doors. You make your recommendations, you get the government to change its proposal package, but when it comes time to vote in the House, as an opposition party you simply cannot be seen to be agreeing with the government. Indeed, there is a narrow, partisan political advantage to being opposed to the government because the government over time becomes unpopular because governments have to make decisions. Oppositions never have to make decisions, that is not their role. Their role is to obfuscate and to bring up minor points, and we used to do it admirably well.

I remember in opposition when we agreed to 90 per cent of a bill, we would stress in our debate only the 10 per cent—one or two items out of 10 items that we disagreed with. That is all we would talk about. We would vote against the bill because, when you are in opposition, you try to keep all of the people out in the country who are opposed to something—the special interest groups usually—on your side so they will vote for you in the next election.

I think Canadians need to understand that on this package the opposition parties played a very meaningful role in getting up to the final package, but of course they cannot be seen to stand in the House and vote for it because that would anger so many of their own narrow partisan supporters—and that is just the way it works, that is democracy.

I want to say to Canadians that they ought not to worry about the allegations being made just now about the lack of efficiency, and about how we will not be here and accountable, and about their rights being cut back. That just is not so.

When you look at the realities of the thing, even under the new proposals where the average sitting days will be reduced from 155 days to 134 days, what you really want to look at is how many hours Parliament will sit over the course of a year. Under the new rules Parliament will sit for more hours than under the existing rules. So in a sense what you are getting from the opposition parties