

Duration of Sittings

committee. I do not care what quarter of the House they come from, but it should be possible for them to go to a committee where they could be carefully considered. This does not mean they would be accepted; they could be modified, if need be, and brought into line, perhaps, with majority thinking. Then one day they could be brought back to the House for adoption in some form or other.

We do not do enough of this sort of thing and I believe it is unfortunate that most of the ideas put forward by private members are simply left to die on the order paper. Since I have been in this chamber, almost 11 years, a number of worth-while suggestions have been put forward by hon. members, including myself, but they were not adopted because of this system we use. It is a big mistake. We sometimes say the committees do not have enough work to keep them busy, that they should be sitting more often, dealing with matters in greater depth and adopting an investigative role. Despite this, we are reluctant to pass on some of these ideas which originate in the private members' hour to committees where they could be discussed more fully and perhaps improved. Undoubtedly the hour of six o'clock will come and someone will still be talking, but at least I put in my plea once again to those who look after government business that it is time to take a more serious look at this whole system and to include some of these private members' bills among the subjects discussed in committee. A number of them might then be incorporated in legislation. If not, at least the views expressed will have been aired. That is what the people of Canada sent us here to do and that is what they expect us to do.

● (1712)

Mr. Rob Parker (Eglinton): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on this private members' bill I suppose I should begin by pointing out the agreement which we on this side of the House have with the author of this bill in that good ideas from all corners of the House are always acceptable. We are very interested in examining suggestions for improvements to the legislation of Canada whether emanating from private members or the government. That sentiment is obviously one which is shared not only by the author of this bill and by members on this side of the House but also, indeed, by the government. It is quite possible to say that all of the good ideas the government has had for the last ten years have come from this side of the House to begin with.

There are a number of things about this bill, however, which, once we get past the principle of being willing to examine any suggestion, occur to me. The first is that this bill purports to amend the British North America Act. I may have been labouring under some sort of delusion for the last 35 years, but it is my understanding that one of the greatest problems facing Canada today is the difficulty of amending the British North America Act.

We have been trying for close to 50 years to amend the British North America Act and we have been unable to agree on exactly how to do it. Here is a private member's bill from a distant corner of the House which purports in four or five

paragraphs to do it. I find that strange. I would not suggest that it is arrogant. I do not think any private members opposite are arrogant. Arrogance is a very special kind of disease, and the carriers opposite are restricted to a certain number of seats. However, if one sits too close to the carrier of a disease, sometimes the spores may be borne on the wind and one can be infected. I would not make that accusation; I merely suggest that it is possible in this case that the author of this bill may have got the idea that with a private member's bill he could do what the government of this country has been unable to do, despite all its efforts, for the past ten years.

In the explanatory notes there is the assertion that, and I quote:

The purpose of this bill is to fix at four years the duration of every House of Commons notwithstanding any successful "no confidence" motion. If a minority government suffered a defeat on what is traditionally accepted as a "no confidence" matter, there would be required the development of a convention of the constitution which would enable a government to carry on until the day fixed for a general election.

I remember a movie a few years ago entitled, I think, "Carry on Regardless," which it seems to me is what is being suggested here: carry on despite having lost the confidence of the House of Commons; carry on despite having been defeated.

In proposed section 50(3) of the act there is provision for a government to be defeated on a motion for the approval of its budgetary policy, a motion to concur in main estimates or a motion expressing lack of confidence, so perhaps that covers that objection; but it seems to me somewhat fundamental to our system of parliamentary democracy that one of the few protections the people of the country have is that, if the government is defeated in this chamber, it must resign and ask for a new mandate. It is verging on the outrageous to suggest that that be altered. One of the fundamental protections in our system is our ability to dismiss the government.

In another clause of the bill it is suggested that there be a ceremonial gathering, a pretty ceremony, once a year on or about July 1 at which there would be participation by representatives of the different walks of life and ethnic and religious communities in Canada. Surely it is not going too far to suggest that that is what we already have in this chamber. It is the entire purpose and foundation of this chamber that we be representative of the different walks of life and ethnic, religious, social, political and geographic communities in Canada. I would have no objection, in a ceremonial sense, to adding other representation to this body on one day of the year. I think it might be instructive, for example, to have our friends in the fourth estate come down from their special perch for a while, but I am not sure that would get directly at what the hon. member is suggesting in this bill.

The hon. member also suggested that perhaps there is too much partisanship. He suggested that the proof of that argument is that frequently people comment that there is too much partisanship. That reminds me of a duck flying through a cloud of birdshot and saying, "There is too much birdshot around here". The hunter does not object to the birdshot, just the bird, and he objects to it because it is aimed at him. That may be what has happened on the other side of this House.