

*Government Orders*

One reason Parliament exists is to give the people a choice in who will administer public funds.

But reducing the number of days devoted to considering spending or cuts proposed by the government attacks the very principle of our parliamentary system, if I go by the third edition of the *Precis of Procedure*.

A fundamental aspect of Parliament is to give the opposition an opportunity to show why appropriations should be refused, but this can be done less effectively if there are fewer days to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, opposition days are not the only victims of the government motion to change the procedure of this House.

The parliamentary calendar is also a victim of the government's proposals. The motion proposes reducing the sitting days of the House of Commons from 175, Mr. Speaker. According to the present calendar, we should sit for about 175 days, although the government does not always stick to the calendar. The reform would reduce it by 40 to 135 days. That is a reduction of 23 per cent in the number of sitting days.

In other words, it would increase by 21 per cent the number of days that government members could travel in their ridings. I have the present calendar here with me, according to the present Standing Orders 24(1) and 28 of the House, and for 1991, if we adhered to this calendar, which we have not, Mr. Speaker—we are in April 1991. If we had adhered to the calendar, in January 1991, we would have sat only three weeks; in February, the same, three weeks; in March, three and a half weeks; in April, three weeks. Only in May would we sit four and half weeks, and three and a half weeks in June. In September, we would sit three weeks, and in October, five weeks, in November, three weeks and in December, three weeks.

In most of the months that we sit—and it must be said that we do not sit at all in July and August—we sit on average three weeks a month when we follow the calendar, Mr. Speaker. So why these changes? If we are unable to follow a calendar that already gives members some time to go to their ridings and meet their constitu-

ents, if that is the real intention, and I doubt it, but even if it were really the government's intention, we already have the time needed to go to our ridings and hear from our constituents. So as you see, there are definitely other reasons for taking 40 sitting days from a calendar which only provides for 165 sitting days out of the 365 in a year.

There is another important fundamental principle of our system and it involves the role of Parliament. Its role is to make the government face its responsibilities. For the less we sit, the less the government is forced to face its responsibilities to the people.

The forum Canadians have to force their government to answer for its actions is Parliament. Mr. Speaker, this is an essential component of responsible government.

The Conservative Members ask for more time to visit their ridings, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, the popularity of the Conservative Party is at the lowest level since polls were taken in Canada. This government is the most unpopular of any since polls were first taken. We understand that very well. That is why I was just wondering whether the real reason is that they want to hear from their constituents or that they want to go back to their ridings and start campaigning two years before the next election because they have completely lost the confidence of the Canadian people.

• (1650)

So Mr. Speaker, let us call a spade a spade. This proposal is purely political. It does nothing to improve the effectiveness of the House of Commons. The Conservatives want to boost their popularity and are hiding behind the idea of improving how the House operates. It is hypocrisy.

Reducing the number of days the House sits would limit Canadians' power to force the government of the day to answer for its actions to the people. It must be said that the motion proposing changes to the Standing Orders includes several examples of the point I just made: limiting the power of Canadians to force the government to explain itself in Parliament. Reducing the number of sitting days in itself reduces the ability of elected members to question the government of the day.