

Government Orders

allotted to them to debate legislation proposed by the government.

I think that the effectiveness of Parliament would thus be reduced. The quality of legislation would suffer and, again the role of legislators would be diminished in public opinion.

With the present Standing Orders, the House has not at all been idle. We need only look at what has happened in the past two years. The House has not been paralysed, it has not been held up by the delaying tactics of the opposition as the government leader would have us believe. Since April 3, 1989, the House of Commons has sat 299 days. In that time, we have studied 100 bills and 30 government motions. We have had 48 opposition days. Nearly 150 public bills and 712 motions from members were presented. From April 3, 1989 to December 31, 1990, members debated 96 government bills for 569 hours and 37 minutes, an average of roughly 6 hours per bill, which is not excessive, Mr. Speaker. It is not what I would call delaying tactics by the opposition. Members made 3,701 statements under Standing Order 31. They asked 6,108 oral questions. One hundred seventy reports from standing, joint, special and legislative committees, were tabled. Eight thousand thirty-seven petitions were presented in the House. Mr. Speaker, in two years, that is a lot of work. Delaying tactics did not prevent members from working. Just look. Just ask. It is there, it is public. The records are open to everyone.

Therefore, it is wrong to say that the present Standing Orders have served this Parliament badly. And I ask why then, Mr. Speaker, repair something that works and that works well? To calm some people on the government side who are losing ground in public opinion? That is no reason. To hide the government's desire to muzzle legislators, the Standing Orders are being used to have us believe that it will improve the situation. Mr. Speaker, we are not that naive.

The most important privilege given to a member so that he can perform his duties freely is the freedom of speech, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we should strive for, to let more members express themselves and tell the House what their constituents are telling them, to express their constituents' opinions in the House.

With these proposals before us, the federal government is restricting the right to speak and, I think, hindering us in the performance of our duties.

• (1540)

[English]

The government has brought forward substantial changes to the rules. We in the Liberal Party oppose several of these changes, not all, several of them, and I will touch upon the main ones.

Many Canadians do not understand, and I do not blame them, all the rules of procedure of this House, the intent, the impact, and therefore cannot appreciate the changes. But take it from me, these changes will not improve debate. These changes will not give more members of Parliament more time to debate questions of importance to this country. We believe that Canadians must be made aware of what is going on in Parliament and to do that, we believe, Parliament sits and should sit longer.

I was here from 1972 until 1978-79. We used to sit at night. We did not like it very much but we sat until 10 or 10.30 p.m. and we thought we would improve things. We changed the system. We improved it by allowing members of Parliament to go home for supper with their children, by allowing members of Parliament to go to their ridings more often. It was an improvement which I think was successful.

Yet, here we have a proposal that in my view does nothing to restore or improve public faith in Parliament. In *The Ottawa Citizen* of March 23, the government House leader is quoted as saying: "The changes are needed to rekindle public faith in the institution of Parliament". He goes on: "The excesses of the adversarial extremes have brought disfavour on the House and reduced our reputation".

Coming from a member of a party that stormed the Chair, that rang the bells for two weeks, how much credibility does that have? Not much.

In *The Globe and Mail* of March 23 the same person, the government House leader, was described as believing, and I quote: "that Canadians are jaded with perpetual political bickering in Parliament. The people want their politicians to make a difference and they want them to spend more time closer to the voters".