

Government Orders

the government should come back with something else and not stubbornly keep the reform as it is.

I do not think that we should consider this reform to be permanent; rather, it is subject to improvement at any time. We are trying to use new mechanisms. Experience and practice will show whether it has met the objectives.

I will close with some suggestions that are not found in this reform. First, I am thinking of this mechanism for an inquiry which exists in Quebec City whereby the leader of the official opposition can question the premier on a specific issue for an hour, with the Speaker of the House present, to get to the bottom of an important subject, which cannot be done in the daily question period. This exchange between the premier and the leader of the opposition helps the people form a better idea of the issues involved in a debate, which can only be healthy in a democracy. This exists and goes on in Quebec City, not every week but occasionally, and we could do it here.

A second suggestion concerns the ban on reading our speeches in this House; that is why no lectern is provided.

• (1300)

Everyone knows that members read their speeches to all intents and purposes. They have notes and they read them. In reality, it is rather hypocritical. The Solicitor General, who is the Leader of the Government in the House, read his entire speech on the proposed reforms, whereas this is prohibited, Mr. Speaker. Of course you did not stop him, because everyone does it. Only the budget speech can be read, because the Minister of Finance cannot be expected to recall all of the figures. I would point out that once the budget is adopted, very often he cannot recall the figures.

The point is that in reality, things are quite different. One thing must be recognized: members are not supposed to read their speeches because they should speak spontaneously, from the heart. Well, I have nothing against members reading their speeches. Everyone does, so why not recognize this fact. It would be a lot simpler than having to carry around books on which to prop up our speeches. It would be much simpler if members had a lectern.

My third suggestion is this: except for emergencies, votes should be held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays because some members are in their ridings on Mondays and Fridays. We divide our caucus in two because we must also work in our ridings. A number of members from more remote ridings must leave on Thursday after oral question period.

We must recognize this fact. I do not see how concentrating the votes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays impedes democracy. On the contrary, it would help to create a better balance between House and riding work and the parties already agreed to this so far, that is up to week three.

One final suggestion. I realize that it is against the rules for you to have a list of speakers. Yet, I gave my list to you at the beginning of the debate, as did the others. Again, the rules do not correspond to reality. Everyone knows that the Speaker has a list of those members who will be asking questions during oral question period. No one says that this is prohibited. Yet, we exchange lists and submit them to you every day so that you can refer to them during statements under Standing Order 31.

In my opinion, the time has come to dispense with this pretence. It would be much easier if we knew exactly who was planning to speak. Each party could submit its list and you could work with that. Then everyone would know who was planning to speak and when. Why not recognize what actually happens? Why not let people know when their members will speak, instead of pretending that I do not give you a list? By the way, in one hour I will be submitting my list for oral question period, as I do every day.

These are just a few suggestions which would help us do away with old habits that no longer correspond to reality.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie. His comments were highly constructive and his suggestions are much appreciated.

I do not agree with his suggestion that votes should take place only on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. It is a problem in this House because we only sit 130 days a year, roughly, under the new system introduced by the former government. Every three or four weeks the House adjourns for one or two weeks. At Easter, for instance, there is a two-week recess. It is at such times that members should be travelling to their constituencies, not now when the House is sitting. In my opinion, when the House is in session, the members should be here.

There is enough time to work in the constituencies on weekends and during the weeks when the House is not sitting. That is why I do not agree with him that we should not hold votes on Thursdays. Those are simply my thoughts on his speech.

I think that he may have misunderstood the government's intention in putting this proposal before the House today because we did propose a change to the second reading of bills as he suggested. We will only have a very short three-hour debate on the motion to refer the bill to a standing committee after the first reading.