

*Government Orders*

maybe there is more going on around here than has caught my eye, I feel that there is not enough going on.

Among the three branches of the democratic system, we have the legislative, the executive and the judicial branch. Parliament is the one that we, the people, had to fight for and put in place, not the judicial and not the executive. We had to fight to fight for, build and create Parliament. Any rule change that is going to impair parliamentary function is an error and should not be passed.

In a funny kind of way, as we all should be working to protect Parliament, maybe we should be a little frustrated by these evolutionary changes in Parliament that have diminished its role. If you look over your shoulder and look out on the street and read the editorials, maybe you see just a little bit of the fire and of the impetus that gave rise to the rebellions in the last century. Not that we are close to that now, but the people can get angry. I think that a little bit of that is happening right now.

I would like to address more specifically a couple of the rule changes as they relate to the committee oversight function. An example is item No. 52 governing Standing Order 113. Here the government has suggested that witnesses who come before a legislative committee to review legislation after second reading should only be called on technical matters. Where did that term come from? I do not think anybody knows where that term came from. As I search for a rationale or a logic for the term "technical matters", as a lawyer I become a little bit curious about that. It does not come from tradition. I have not seen it as a precedent and I have not even seen a definition, but it means something like dotting the *i*'s and crossing the *t*'s. Somehow that is a most inappropriate restriction to put on a legislative committee. If you have a change in a bill governing tax credits to seniors, surely you have to ask seniors what they think about the bill or how the bill will impact on them and not restrict that group to whether or not the government lawyers have dotted the *i*'s and crossed the *t*'s. There is much more than that.

I am going to move on quickly to a second area that was brought to my attention by the chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations. There is an apparent omission in item No. 53 governing the selection of alternates who would sit on committees. The

new rules apparently require that the alternates be selected from the envelope involved. Unfortunately, that particular standing committee, the Joint Standing Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, is not in any of the envelopes. It is a joint committee and, therefore, the restriction on selecting alternates from an envelope has no place.

In discussion with the parliamentary secretary to the House leader, there was an understanding that alternates for that committee could be selected from the entire opposition caucus or the government caucus, as the case may be. I want that to be on the record.

Another of the proposed changes deals with the reduction of sitting days from 175 days to approximately 135. I have already discussed the principles that should provide ample time for debate of issues, but how does that change affect committees?

I suggest that by squeezing more government business into fewer days, this rule change will take away sitting days from committees. That may result in committees abandoning some of their oversight work. That oversight work is extremely important. One of the committees I sit on, the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General, is about to look at estimates involving the expenditures of sums greater than this country has ever spent before. We are advised it will take 13 days just to skate through it.

As I look at the possible parliamentary calendar here, with a possible adjournment foisted upon us, or planned by the government, I am getting a little nervous that we will not have an opportunity to look at those estimates. This is at a time when our government is spending its brains out. The public assumes that Parliament is exercising some scrutiny or oversight on spending. I can tell them that we will be lucky to get a half dozen committee meetings in scrutinizing this expenditure in the Justice and Solicitor General area. So I am a little nervous about that and I hope that members opposite will take that into consideration.

Just because we reduced the sitting days to 135 does not mean, of course, that Parliament cannot sit longer. It is quite possible that the government and all members would decide to sit for greater than 135 days. But I do not like the principle of squeezing the sitting days of Parliament to a minimum. If it serves government, that is