

Government Orders

operations of our activities as members of Parliament representing our constituents and so on.

We represent our constituents in different ways and in different places through different activities. Some are here in Ottawa in this Chamber and some are here in Ottawa in other circumstances, in committees and so on, and some are back in the ridings meeting with constituents and dealing with their concerns. Then we have our other responsibilities to our parties and to the system as a whole to spend some time in other parts of the country also.

My point is that we need to spend as much time here in Ottawa as is necessary to effectively pursue our constituents' concerns and interests and to effectively represent those concerns and interests. By reducing our opportunity as members of Parliament to put forward those arguments, this government is making life more difficult for members of Parliament to do that part of their work which is done here in Ottawa.

I do not understand how anybody could argue that by having less time to debate issues in the House of Commons that our activities as an MP will be improved. How is it better for me to have only 10 minutes to speak rather than 20 minutes? How can that possibly enable me to represent my constituents effectively? Why is the government always interested in ramming legislation through? Why is it not interested in letting all members have an opportunity to speak?

There is one illustration arising from my province. When the New Democratic government in the late 1970s nationalized the Potash Corporation, that debate took 120 days. When the Conservative government in Saskatchewan privatized the Potash Corporation, it used closure for the first time in Saskatchewan and rammed it through in less than a couple of weeks. That is not the way to effectively deal with the issues and have the issues debated. We should be looking for ways to facilitate opportunities for MPs to fully contribute to the debates rather than narrow them, rather than to reduce the days of debate on the throne speech and the budget and the length of speeches. How many times have we heard members stand up and say: "I am not able to really say very much in 20 minutes", or "My time is up and I have so much more to say". We need to respond to those concerns too.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing. There is an extension of hours, in my understanding, in the sitting days so that the total number of hours are not decreased by very, very much.

An hon. member: They are increased. The total hours are increased.

Mr. Belsher: The total hours are increased, I am told. My friend beside me has some notes.

Is it not true that the party of which the member is a part has a sort of a semi-form of platooning so that members have three weeks here and one week off. They are almost following this sort of a format. We should like the rest of the members to be able to take advantage of such a format. Is this not a fact of what the New Democrats have actually practised for the last several months?

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that is the case and it has been the case with me, that on occasion I have been able to spend a week in my riding at one period of time. It is not very often I am able to do that, but I try to do it whenever I can. There is certainly no formal procedure within the party which provides each of us with an opportunity to be in the riding for one week a month. Some of us are able to do it. Most of us try to do it because we think it is appropriate for the reasons mentioned by the member for Halifax West to be in the riding and responding to those concerns.

• (1340)

If it happens, it happens. There is no formalized process for it. We do make every effort to be there in the riding so that our constituents can reach us. I presume that every member does the same thing.

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I feel privileged to be able to rise and present a few words in the House, particularly to my distinguished friends opposite, many of whom have sat in the House for as long as I have.

I am coming at this from 12 years' experience. I have now had some eight years on the government side in two separate Parliaments and I also spent a long time in opposition. If there was one constant throughout my