

*Government Orders*

For instance, I remember when we were debating Bill C-21, the Pharmaceutical Act, some years back and both we as opposition parties and the government summoned experts from across the country. They were able to amplify, not only the meaning of the technical language, but its far-reaching effects; not only in three months or six months, but in two or three years. Of course, you always have jurisprudence. You may have common law or decisions reached in other countries which may have a particular effect on our legislation. There may be some judicial decisions before the courts. To limit ourselves as members of Parliament to quote technical witnesses and restricting what a technical witness can be, I think we hamper substantially, the work that members would want to do in terms of improving a particular piece of legislation.

The opposition fully understands that the community at large has many technically competent persons who are not only able, but also are very much needed by any committee on a variety of legislation. Government officials cannot possibly possess adequate expertise to help a committee assess the impact of any piece of legislation. Business, labour, interest groups and academics, potential beneficiaries and potential victims of legislation will all be able to provide the kind of technical assistance that committees require on legislation.

Any ill-conceived attempt by the government to narrow this definition will not merely lead to political difficulty in the House of Commons, it will lead to further public frustration of being shut out of government. That, unfortunately, is the real thrust of the government's proposed rule changes. The real impact is to shut people out of government.

So much for the Prime Minister's statements of an open government. The government must think it clever to claim that its package is intended to do the opposite. It claims that it will give members more time in their constituencies to interact with the people. What it is really doing is reducing both the time and the opportunities for members to try to do something on behalf of those very people.

The government claims its package is designed to enhance the reputation of Parliament. Yet, virtually every one of its proposals is intended to de-fang Parliament. To make it more difficult for Parliament to deal with the issues that concern the people of Canada. All the government will achieve with these proposals is to frustrate Parliament.

• (1730)

It can be sure that the frustration will gain expression most probably, Mr. Speaker,—I say this to you, Sir, being cognizant of the many years that you have spent in this House—in some unforeseen way that is highly unlikely to enhance the reputation of Parliament, let alone the Government of Canada.

The government proposes to deal with a number of procedural issues that simply do not cry out for change, except that in responding to the people they create inconveniences for the government.

Even in cases where the government makes proposals that do need further procedural evolution, the government is acting in a pre-emptory manner or, in the case of the committee system, planting the seeds for future efforts to shut people out.

I wish to be clear on behalf of my party that we are opposed to this package of rule changes and have said so consistently.

I listened to the government House leader talk about the effectiveness in Parliament, the efficiency of Parliament and the cynicism of the Canadian people. He suggested having fewer sitting days because other countries have fewer sitting days than we do, but he did not talk about the geography of Canada. He did not talk about how Canadians are displaced all across this great country. Basically, we have a small population; hence the need for further dialogue and debate, and better appreciation and understanding of different viewpoints.

He makes reference to other countries. As I said earlier in my remarks, it is part of the grand strategy to shut Parliament down.

For a moment, let's talk about the national media. What will it do to the national media in this country? It has a role to play. Sometimes it is not very complimentary to the government and sometimes it is not very complimentary to the opposition. Nevertheless, we live in a free and democratic society and the media has the right to probe, to make ministers accountable for various speeches that they may give across the country.

By shutting down Parliament and by having us sit 40 fewer days, if you will, that will deny the media real access to ministers of the Crown. It will preclude us as members of Parliament to raise issues on the floor of the House of Commons which enable Canadians, through the media, to understand what is going on whether they be valid points of opposition or not. The Canadian people will judge.