

*Summer Recess*

accomplish much, and after sitting here for a whole week I do not think that many problems have been solved because the opposition insisted on remaining here.

This in no way means, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to deny opposition members the right to speak. I myself chair a committee, and I see here my hon. friend from Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker), who sits on the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, where we were examining the access to information bill. I tried as chairman to give people every opportunity to express their views and put questions. But faced with this whole situation here with so much talk and empty words, I would say as an experienced member of the legal profession that when we have to proceed in court and make a case either for the plaintiff or the defendant, at some point the judge says enough, and that is that. I feel unfortunately that our Standing Orders are really antiquated.

There is something that is unbelievable. I have no intention, of course, of denying the opposition their basic right to speak. Under the Latin maxim *audi alteram partem*, used in the courts of justice, the other side has to be heard. That is important. But there comes a point when enough is enough, and I feel that faced with that whole problem, we ought to make some change. On this side of the House, there are 146 or 148 members, we have a majority, and there is the opposition, but something is amazing. This government or rather the House can easily be opened under an order from the Speaker, but it cannot be closed without the use of a section of what I could call the code of procedure. It cannot be closed without consent.

Some ministers who used to be House leaders used to say that the House of Commons only works with consent, and it is my experience over a year and half that indeed the House does not work without consent. House leaders, both from the government, the official opposition and the New Democratic Party, meet and discuss the various bills that are to be called in order to know if they are to go through or not. There must be consent. Without consent, the bill cannot go through, and without consent the House cannot adjourn. This is a vicious circle, Mr. Speaker. What should we do? The House can be opened but cannot be closed without invoking a standing order, Standing Order 33, and the other side says this is an insult to democracy, an infringement of the right to speak! I understand that my hon. colleague from Nepean-Carleton and my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre, have been sitting, along with the hon. member from Drummond (Mr. Pinard), on a committee dealing with parliamentary reform.

As far as I know, everyone was agreeable to cutting down on the time members would be allowed to speak. Their right to speak would not be infringed upon but we were going to cut it down in order to update this institution. In fact, it would have to be done because the present situation is quite extraordinary.

While respecting the right to speak of every member how can we explain that after one week of debate on different subjects, and mainly on the motion of adjournment, that we are now forced to resort to this procedure, that is Standing Order 33? I think this is an abuse. Can we say, that as a result of being here for the past week there has been some progress in the postal strike situation? Has there been a settlement? Has something happened in that respect? Nothing has been done. A mediator was appointed. Is it because the opposition as well as the government were sitting in the House that the matter got settled? I have said that the House can be recalled quickly, that it only takes a telegram from the Speaker requesting the calling of the House as has happened last fall when we reconvened on October 6 instead of the 14th or the 15th of October as scheduled. The House could have quite easily gone on summer recess last Friday and it could have been recalled if necessary by the Chair to continue with the debate.

Mr. Speaker, all this points out to the fact that our rules are quite out of date and that they should definitely be changed. Let us give members the right to speak, I agree. But, nothing in our little green book of Standing Orders denies honourable members of this House the right to ask questions or to participate in a debate. Mr. Speaker, if, during question period, the Chair had to recognize as many government members as opposition members, honourable members opposite would feel discriminated against and denied the right to speak. But in fact, it is in the Standing Orders that members of the government have as much right as members of the opposition to ask questions.

But what has happened? A custom developed as a result of which opposition members ask more questions than members of the party in power. However, the traditional right, under Standing Orders of the House for any member to ask questions, is the same for everyone. If the rules were applied to the letter, every time a member of the opposition would get up, a member of government should get up also if we were to follow the rules and the floor should be given to a member on the left and on the right and on the far right, thus we would draw a circle and as many members from this side could speak. But, members across the floor would complain that they are being denied the right to speak. However, that is the rule! Mr. Speaker, for all those reasons, I think it is about time we bring improvements to the standing rules and orders of this House. But if I am referring to the present situation, it is to point out that although some of those orders may appear outmoded, they did not preclude 65 bills from reaching the third reading stage and royal assent since April 1980. These include Bill C-16, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, Bill C-36, an Act respecting the national anthem of Canada and several other bills which were adopted.

Regarding the bill to change the Post Office into a Crown corporation, I remember that when the bill reached the third reading stage, in this House, hon. members from the other side