

Royal Assent

is, but this particular measure will set back the cause of bringing women to Parliament.

I urge you, and I urge government members with some backbone, to ignore the jackboots of closure that have been imposed by the Prime Minister today and to respect the fact that any time the parliamentary rules are changed, they should be changed by the consensus among all members, so that in fact we can raise the quality of debate in this place and we can also give all Canadians the chance to come here and represent their constituents.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on this bill today. It is a bill that is going to be very damaging to something that people have fought for long and hard for centuries, and that is the right to a parliamentary democracy.

People have fought and died. We must remember that others are continuing to fight and die for what we have, and which the government now proposes to diminish, the right to hold the rulers accountable for how they govern, how they use the resources of their people, and how they plan for the future of the nation.

What we have here is the tyranny of the majority imposing on the Canadian people and on their representatives in this House a gag for 25 per cent more of the time.

It is seven centuries since people first fought and risked their lives to establish parliamentary democracy. It is the reason why the distance between our two front benches is two swords' lengths, so that kind of destruction is not necessary in the parliamentary system any longer. We now want to give up a large portion of what has been so hard won over so many centuries.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General spoke the other day about the importance of being here to speak for the people we represent and the importance of a government being able to implement its agenda. He talked very eloquently about something that I agree with entirely, which is the importance of election campaigns, the importance of going to Canadians with a platform and a program.

• (1630)

He stopped short of what election campaigns are really all about. It is not telling people what we are going to do and then going off blindly and doing it for the next four or five years, regardless of what happens or how circumstances change.

What it is really all about is listening to people and hearing the values that are important to them, letting them comment on what we are proposing to them and taking those comments into account when we come into this House to make the rules, laws and decisions about how we are going to spend their money.

The government claims it has a mandate to implement its agenda and a responsibility to ride roughshod over parliamentary democratic procedures to implement that agenda. In fact, that is not the entire responsibility of a government or Parliament. It is to reflect the views of Canadians about what kind of a country they want.

It is to reflect the values that members have heard from their constituents and it is to apply those values to changing circumstances. It is not to blindly follow a political agenda that does not have anything to do at times with what is good for the country.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General was right about one thing: We are here to speak for the people we represent. What these changes to the Standing Orders do is merely to strangle our right to speak on their behalf.

The tyranny of the majority is something that democracy always has to be on guard against. That is why we have a parliamentary system where there is a government and an opposition.

The role of the opposition is to hold the government accountable. When we established parliamentary democracies or as we developed them over the centuries, we did not say that once we elect a government it has the right to do whatever it wants to do.

It has the power. That does not give it the right to do whatever it wants to do regardless of what is said in this House and by Canadians. We have this Parliament where every day the government can be held accountable for its actions. It can be called upon to explain its actions. At times, it can be called upon to change its actions.