

and to pose questions during question period—but not obtain answers. These are important duties but we also have duties to our constituents, and increasingly so. The past experience of my predecessors in the House of Commons indicates the workload from a constituency point of view has certainly increased immeasurably. Therefore, my suggestion is that we should have a very serious look at our responsibilities in Ottawa and in our constituencies in light of the West German experience.

West Germany is a federal state as well. As many hon. members know, its parliament sits for three weeks in each month—and members spend the fourth week in their constituencies. This is an established, fixed practice. It is something at which we should look with a great deal of care. In a country as diverse as ours, hon. members have an obligation to return to their constituencies in order to meet with farm groups, small businessmen, trade unionists and other constituents. We should look at this idea with a great deal of seriousness. If we can tighten up our rules and practices to enable us from a legislative point of view to accomplish in three weeks what would normally take four, there is no reason we should not be able to allocate the fourth week for hon. members to do effective work in their constituency offices. We should look with care once in a while at new ideas that have been implemented somewhere else.

I have put forward a number of suggestions which, along with those proposed by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and by the government House leader, would help make government, the House of Commons and individual Members of Parliament more relevant in their different obligations in the House of Commons. However, in putting these suggestions forward I emphasize that we cannot delay any longer. There should be a reference of the position paper mentioned in the motion to committee, along with the ideas I have suggested and other documentation proposed by the government House leader, and I think that reference should be made soon. Also I think it would be very advantageous if the committee submitted a report not later than June 30, 1982, or before the summer recess, with very specific recommendations.

Further, I take for granted that these suggestions would come on the basis of an all-party consensus, and that all parties would work seriously to achieve this goal. We would have the report before the recess, and I suggest that we could try the new proposals when we return in September or whenever until December. We could have a House order to that effect and we could try them for that three-month period. If we found that they were effective improvements with which we as Members of Parliament could live, they could become part of our permanent practices. If, after the experience of the fall, they were found to be defective, we could revert to the present system and hopefully continue to look for improvements. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition, and I hope the government, agree that we cannot wait any longer for reform. Let us move and move now.

I should like to make a few comments regarding the question of trust and its profound relevance to parliamentary

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democracy. As I said earlier, and I repeat and emphasize now, none of the proposals made today by the government House leader or the Leader of the Opposition, if they or the best possible set of rules imaginable had been in operation, would have avoided, in my judgment, the parliamentary impasse we experienced during the past 16 days. No matter what set of rules or practices are in existence, if a political party represented in the House of Commons wants to grind Parliament to a halt, it can do so. Parliamentary democracies operate on the fundamentally important principle of trust at two levels. First, there is the trust which ordinary people—truck drivers, bank clerks, farmers, small businessmen and all Canadians—have in their elected representatives. It is very important to maintain that trust. The second trust is one which is essential if we are to function as a legislative body. It is essential for the parties in the House to have trust for one another.

If there is to be the first trust to which I referred, that is the trust of Canadians in their Members of Parliament, then all politicians must be seen to be doing what they promised. In that context, politicians must be seen also to be relevant to the everyday concerns of the ordinary people of this country. Without that kind of relevance and integrity, cynicism becomes rife in a democracy, whether in Canada or in any other democratic country. My own sense of the reality of Canada right now is that cynicism about politicians and about political institutions is growing. It is something other than high school level speculation. Perhaps that is easy to say, but it is so easily dismissed as being a cliché or a trite observation.

• (1650)

Those who have studied European democracies between the wars know very well that attitudes formed by the public toward political institutions have great significance in terms of the survival of those institutions. We in the House of Commons have to be concerned about the growing state of cynicism in the country about politicians and about the House of Commons.

Trust is important. The trust Canadians have in Parliament is also related to the way we as politicians—and to put it in more relevant terms, we as parties—perform here in this House and how we relate to each other day in and day out, whether in practices or procedures. In this television age this becomes more and more important because increasing numbers of Canadians quite literally see us here responding to each other. In my view, when they see Liberal Party members, Conservative Party members or New Democratic Party members, they see parties who differ profoundly on important questions facing the nation.

There are now and always will be seriously different approaches to what is the desirable goal for Canadian society. There is now, and I hope always will be, very tough-minded debates in the House, and a no-pulling-of-punches attitude when we deal with matters of substance that we think and feel deeply concern the future of this nation. However, this does not mean that for parliamentary democracy to function, the