

Party at that time and that concern was pushed aside by the then Minister of Justice, now the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Chrétien). Section 5 of the Canadian Constitution Act, 1981 states as follows:

There shall be a sitting of Parliament and of each legislature at least once every twelve months.

If that means that under the Constitution the House has to sit only one day a year, we are in deep trouble, Mr. Speaker. As the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) suggested, that would virtually destroy our concept of parliamentary democracy and responsible government. We would virtually be relegated to the status of a Supreme Soviet.

This speaks to our concern over omnibus Bills, Mr. Speaker. The Parliamentary Secretary referred to the ringing of the bells as one of the reasons for the unprecedented length of this session. He forgot to add the reason the bells rang for so long was that it was the only way this Party had to protect the right of Parliament to deal with specific items of legislation and not in an omnibus fashion. If that practice were not arrested the result could be that Parliament would be convened for one day to deal with a "welfare of Canada act" which would cover everything. We would pass that great omnibus Bill and adjourn to the next year. I believe that that is the way some so-called Parliaments function in totalitarian states. I do not believe that is the interpretation placed on this by the Government of Canada which framed the wording of the present Constitution. I believe that the wording, the thrust and the spirit of Section 20 of the old British North America Act is as valid today as it was when introduced.

We now have a session of unprecedented length, a session that is going into its fourth year. That has never happened before. If you examine the record of Parliament over the last 100 years or so, Mr. Speaker, you will find it has only been in times of minority Government that a session would extend a short time beyond a year. The situation we find ourselves in today is virtually without precedent.

It is interesting that this Parliament and this unprecedented session has had to sit by while the Government acted in an extra-legal fashion, in my humble opinion, in bringing in the VIA Rail integration of major rail passenger services in this country without an Act of Parliament. There still has been no legislation establishing VIA Rail. I suppose the Government will get around to dealing with that when it gets around to proroguing the session and bringing in a new Speech from the Throne.

It is not without interest either that, even though we find ourselves with the highest unemployment rate since the great Depression, there has been no legislation dealing with unemployment. We have the NEED Program, we have the Canada Community Development Program, we have the Student Employment Program, but it is interesting to note that even though the nomenclature of these programs changes every year, they all stem from the same program that was started without legislation at the commencement of the session. I refer to the Local Initiatives Program. The rules change every year because there is no statute law governing these make-work programs.

### Supply

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is the arguments we have heard today from the Government House Leader and his Parliamentary Secretary are spurious, self-serving and cannot in any way justify the situation that exists.

I am a Member of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure which was set up to try to do something about our rules which have not been changed in any way since 1969 when the provisional rules that we are operating under became permanent with the invocation of closure. There is a substantial amount of goodwill within this Committee, Mr. Speaker. There is a degree of collegiality and non-partisanship that I have never witnessed in my 22 years in the House. Notwithstanding the work of the Committee—and we are now operating under recommendations from that Committee on a provisional, temporary basis and we have two or three reports before the House setting out further changes in the rules which have not been acted upon—it is my view that one of the reasons this Parliament has become the most angry, raucous Parliament in our history is that the Government has failed to bring in a new program to prorogue the session which, in fact, is Parliament's way of renewing itself. In other words, we start off the session with the Speech from the Throne. Some of the things in it are dropped along the way, some things merge in legislative form which were not in the Speech from the Throne, but the Speech itself and the accompanying ceremony is Parliament's way of getting its act together. It is an ongoing process of Parliament renewing itself with a new sense of priorities, because priorities change. Obviously the priorities of the country change, the priorities of the economy change and naturally the priorities of the Government have to change. The manifestation of this change in priorities is the Speech from the Throne opening a new session.

I think it is a valid theory that one of the reasons we find ourselves in the mess we are in today is the failure of the Government to prorogue Parliament, to bring in a new Speech with a new program outlining the Government's priorities, to deal with unemployment, with the housing crisis and the things we have had to deal with, many of them in an ad hoc way. I hope, and I say this in all sincerity, that the Government will take this argument seriously, because I do not believe we are going to accomplish very much in this session.

● (1530)

I do not believe there is a great deal more to be said for this session unless the Government is prepared to make a new start and, indeed, I believe it is too late for that, because a Government which has lost the confidence of the people of Canada, as this Government has, cannot really expect to regain the confidence of the House. Even though it may hold numerical strength, in terms of confidence votes, the fact of the matter is it does not enjoy the goodwill of the House, if you can express confidence in that way. Of course, that speaks to its inability to get its legislative program through.

Be that as it may, however, I still believe that the Government has a clear responsibility to prorogue this session, start a new session and outline its priorities, the budget coming