

*Extension of Sittings*

ways that they did not work before. But some of the things have not worked out—

**Mr. Lewis:** Like petitions.

**Mr. Blaikie:**—for instance, the whole question of evening sittings. The idea of the reform committee was not to telescope the parliamentary day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The idea was to free up the evenings for committee work. That has not happened.

There are other things that have not worked. One of the things that is now at risk as a result of the phoney emergency back in August of 1987, and now this, is the parliamentary calendar.

I feel obliged to get on my feet on behalf of the members of those two reform committees that I belonged to, on behalf of Members now, and on behalf of future Members of Parliament, to say that if we sacrifice this parliamentary calendar to the Government's political agenda—and that is all it is, it is not as if there is any great emergency; if there is an emergency then it should make that case to the Chair—to its political pre-election agenda, then we will be doing a disservice not only to ourselves, but I want to make the larger claim that what is at stake is the health of the parliamentary institution itself.

It is not our self-interest that we should be concerned about here. We cannot go back to the game of psychological chicken that we played every year in the summer-time with each other. One of the things that the reform committee was trying to escape for everybody's sake was that kind of political chicken that gets played. There is no need to revive it. That is what is so infuriating about this.

● (1640)

There is absolutely no need for this motion to be before us except as a tactic on the part of the Government. I do not mind the Government using every tactic it has available to it within the rules. But what I do not like, and I have seen it happen a couple of times recently, is when the Government makes a unilateral decision with respect to how we are going to deal with the abortion issue and then it changes the Standing Orders accordingly, or the Government makes a unilateral decision with respect to the parliamentary calendar. For one thing it shows a lack of resources. The Government is not smart enough to figure out something within the rules, so it breaks the rules in order to get its way.

I am appealing to you, Mr. Speaker, to stem this growing tide of unilateral action on the part of the Government. Parliament is a Parliament. It has rules. It is not to be a dictatorship by the majority. If these types of procedures are allowed to stand we will come to see dictatorship by the parliamentary majority, the very thing that the Conservatives said time and again that they were against when the Liberals attempted to do it and unilaterally changed the Standing Orders in 1969. That was a tradition that we overcame in the early 1980s with the consensus of everyone here.

I find it a great parliamentary irony, tragedy, call it what you will, that it is a Conservative Government that is breaking that consensus and acting to re-establish the notion of the dictatorship of the majority in this House and lack of respect for the rules. All of us here, and future Parliaments, will come to rue the day we throw out the parliamentary calendar. We had it there with a little window where we had some sanity in this place. Some Members are trying to chuck that out of the window and everyone will pay as long as Parliament continues to exist for the fact that the Government put its own political agenda before the health of this institution.

**Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board):** I have a few brief comments, Mr. Speaker. I understand that you have heard quite a bit of argument and I, for one, do not wish to prolong or repeat anything that may have been stated by other parties.

I wish to suggest to my friend, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie), that he is suggesting two things. First, I wish to deal with the procedural argument which seems to be that the Standing Orders cannot be changed without unanimous consent. I would refer my hon. friend to Standing Order 56(1)(o) which states:

56(1) The following motions are debatable:

Every motion:

(o) for the suspension of any Standing Order unless otherwise provided;

**Mr. Blaikie:** It is otherwise provided.

**Mr. Lewis:** I submit that one is able to suspend the Standing Orders. Second, prior to my re-entering the Chamber, I understand that Your Honour made reference to section 49 of the British North America Act which states:

Questions arising in the House of Commons shall be decided by a Majority of Voices other than that of the Speaker, and when the Voices are equal, but not otherwise, the Speaker shall have a Vote.

In other words, it seems to me that a question raised in the House of Commons shall be decided by a majority of the Members of the House of Commons.

**Mr. Blaikie:** When it is in order. When the motion is in order. What we are debating is whether or not it is in order.

**Mr. Kempling:** You are not the judge.

**Mr. Blaikie:** Neither are you.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am going to have to give this some very careful consideration, probably assisted by all Hon. Members allowing each other to put their argument. The Hon. Minister.

**Mr. Lewis:** I will close with the following comments: I will go on to read to my friend Section 50 of the British North America Act which states:

Every House of Commons shall continue for Five Years from the Day of the Return of the Writs for choosing the House . . . and no longer.