

Standing Orders

of bargaining will achieve the unanimity which is in everybody's view, I am certain, the best way to achieve change.

In the absence of a bargaining process which results in change, action becomes necessary. That is what the Government through the motion of the Deputy Prime Minister has done. I am sure the House Leaders of the other Parties even at this moment have the opportunity to negotiate and continue bargaining in order to achieve the changes through that process. While that process is ongoing, action is required. The action has been taken. It is here before us. The rules of the House can be changed now by positive action within the House of Commons.

As I have indicated, and I want to underline that point, we are in a legal limbo with respect to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. We have delayed and failed to come to a final decision on the substance and contents of the Standing Orders. Quite frankly, we do not have the right to continue that delay indefinitely into the future. Failure to achieve unanimity is no excuse for inaction. That is the point we all have to consider. It is not the best way, but it is the only way when agreement cannot be achieved.

● (1530)

I support the motion. I hope other Hon. Members will see fit to do so as well, recognizing that the Government has been forced to put an end to the protracted debate and discussions on the Standing Orders. The Government has been forced to take action to make the rules permanent.

As I said yesterday, Members of the House of Commons are not the only ones who have a stake in the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. There is a broader community across all sectors and elements of Canadian society that look to the House of Commons for direction and guidance. There is more at stake in the public business conducted in the House of Commons than the interests of Members of the House. It is in that broader public concern about action in the House of Commons that we seek to have permanent Standing Orders for all to see, read and be governed by.

Mr. Keeper: Madam Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's comments with regard to House procedures, but I am a bit curious about them. He said that it does not make good sense for opposition Parties to use the rules to hold up legislation. Obviously we in the Opposition do that in order to allow time for debate in the nation so that the full weight of public opinion can come to bear on any action the Government is seeking to undertake.

I wonder how the Hon. Member squares the statement he made today with the behaviour of his own Party when it was in Opposition. I am thinking particularly of the bell-ringing incident. At that time, the operation of the House of Commons was held up for at least a couple of weeks. Is the Hon. Member simply taking his line of argument from the fact that he is now in Government? Will what he is saying now have no bearing at all upon his behaviour and the behaviour of his colleagues

when they are back in Opposition in what will probably be a very short time?

Mr. Crosby: Madam Speaker, I will ignore the last sentence of the Hon. Member's remarks because I thought the question he posed was a fair one and one that requires explanation. In order to explain my position on it, I think we have to go back to the time of the bell-ringing incident.

At that time, there was presented to the House of Commons a constitutional measure which members of the Progressive Conservative Opposition felt was not in the interests of the Canadian people. In order to draw attention to that constitutional measure, and particularly to the process by which it was presented for final approval, it was necessary and essential for us to do something in a dramatic way. We did this so that all Canadians would become aware of what was taking place and would respond to it.

The only alternative that appeared at the time was to find some method to hold up the process in the House of Commons until a broad public awareness could be achieved. The time did go on too long, but while the House of Commons was suspended negotiations were taking place.

Let me point out to the Hon. Member that there was a tremendous risk involved in that process. Had the public decided that the constitutional measure was a proper one and that the Progressive Conservative Opposition of the day had acted improperly in holding up the process in the House of Commons, each of us involved would have suffered greatly at the hands of the public. We took a risk because we thought that public awareness and action required it.

I believe that when there is such an extreme situation, Hon. Members are justified in using the rules of the House of Commons to delay or disrupt the proceedings in a legal way, not by civil disobedience. I would like to distinguish between the kind of tactic that is legal in a technical way and the day-to-day obstruction of the business of the House that is used to achieve other measures. Continual dilatory conduct is quite different.

Let me add that in the case of Bill C-22, for example, members of the Opposition, and I credit them for this, made Canadians aware of the contents of the Bill. They generated public discussion. However, to continue day after day to delay the Bill achieved no useful purpose. I challenge the Opposition in this way. If that Bill is so bad, pass it so that the bad effects of the Bill will be felt by all Canadians. If the Bill is so bad, all Canadians will punish the Government for passing that kind of legislation. In other words, if the position of the Opposition is that a legislative measure is bad, it should do its job and then let it pass. If it is bad, the Government will suffer for it.

Mr. Keeper: Madam Speaker, I must say that it should be obvious to all Canadians that the Hon. Member's argument suits the side of the House on which he is sitting. It astounds me that the Hon. Member has said that when his Party was in Opposition and it perceived an issue that should come to the