

The Hon. Members for Winnipeg—Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie), for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault), for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) and for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) have all eloquently argued that the Government motion would undo years of difficult negotiations by two special committees. The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap has claimed that “we are at a crossroads”. With respect to the calendar, the Lefebvre Committee in its third report, which was concurred in by the House, stated in part:

Your committee is of the opinion that a parliamentary session should be planned on the basis of three annual sitting periods which should ensure a reasonable certainty as to the dates and duration of the periods during which the House would sit.

Consequently, the calendar was inserted into Standing Order 4. The Hon. Member for Calgary West has indicated that the House has sat during two of those summer adjournments. These sittings, however, were the result of an application to the Speaker under the terms of Standing Order 5 and not as a result of a motion similar to the one presently on the Order Paper.

As some Members have suggested, the Speaker must take into account not only the letter of the rules but also their spirit. In addition, as I have said before in previous rulings, the Chair should also rely on that most basic rule of all, that of common sense.

To those Hon. Members who have asked me to reject the Government's motion on the basis that it is the “tyranny of the majority”, I should like to point to them the possible consequences of accepting their advice.

If a Speaker rules that the Standing Orders could only be suspended or changed by the unanimous consent of the House, the situation could arise where the House would be in jeopardy of becoming procedurally the hostage of a single Member. Indeed, one Member, and one Member alone, could prevent any future procedural reform by withholding his or her consent. For example, one Member could prevent the House from adjourning in the month of May even if all other 281 Members preferred to adjourn prior to June 30.

The unique flexibility of the British parliamentary system, a flexibility which has allowed for adaptations to an infinite variety of circumstances, would be jeopardized. Clearly that is undesirable.

The Chair, however, is very supportive of the parliamentary calendar as brought forward by the Lefebvre Committee. I believe it has been responsible for bringing order to our proceedings and has encouraged and fostered negotiation and compromise between the Parties in the days leading up to the automatic adjournments. Without that co-operation and constant negotiation and compromise, our system of government ceases to operate smoothly. If the Chair were to support the view that only consent can modify the calendar, I would be establishing a precedent that would not only refute our practice and precedents to date but would make further reform almost unachievable and it would certainly be far more

Extension of Sittings

difficult to achieve the kinds of hallmark amendments brought forward in 1982 and 1985. The motion of the Hon. Minister of State (Mr. Lewis) was therefore properly before the House.

• (1520)

I want to add one thing. There is an old saying that I may have referred to before, that hard cases make bad law. There was in this case a very natural temptation for the Speaker to try to find some way to uphold the continuance of the calendar. I have to advise regretfully those who argued so strenuously for that course of action, that I think that would have been a case of hard cases making bad law and I had to come down on the side of where I think the procedural law stands. As a consequence, it is accordingly my duty to propose the question.

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)) moves:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or practice of the House, from the day of adoption of this motion and until no later than Friday, September 9, 1988, the House will meet on the days and at the times specified in Standing Order 3, but not on August 1;

That, during such period, the Speaker shall adjourn the House on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10.00 o'clock p.m., and on Wednesdays at 6.00 o'clock p.m., and on Fridays at 3.00 o'clock p.m., and that the provisions of Standing Order 66 relating to the adjournment proceedings shall be suspended;

That, during such period, the Standing Order respecting the daily mid-day interruption of business on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays shall not be suspended;

That, at 6.00 o'clock p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, or at the conclusion of Private Members' Business, the House shall proceed to “Government Orders” pursuant to Standing Order 22;

That, following the adoption of this motion, no motion under Standing Order 10(1) shall be receivable; and

That this special order shall not apply on any allotted days designated in the supply period ending June 30, 1988.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to start my remarks by saying that we appreciate the scope of your judgment and the comments therein. I think it fair to say that we especially appreciate that in following this course of action the Government must pay heed to the parliamentary calendar and not change same without having a very reasoned argument for doing so. I am pleased to put forward the Government's comments with respect to the extension of the hours and of the sitting to allow for greater participation by Members to complete the outstanding work before the House in as short a time as possible.

As you suggested, the House has a calendar which sets forth the days, the weeks, and the months when it will sit. The natural question is: Why the change? How does the Government support the change in the calendar and thus this motion? I want to give you briefly, if I may, some six reasons, and elaborate on them, as to why we want to change the calendar.

The first is that we have an agenda as a Government which has been well thought out and which we believe is in the interests of the country.