

*Government Orders*

In any event, I want to point out at the outset that I and my colleagues are not opposed to changes in the rules. I know it is fair to say that we are not even opposed to each and every one of the rule changes proposed here.

There are some reasonably evolved, logically written, new rule changes that will improve the functions of this House. We are not opposed to rule changes that will make committees of the House more permanent or better targeted in their use of resources. The proposed rule change that would abandon the bell ringing when two votes are scheduled at the same time is so terribly logical that one would wonder why the bells were capable of being rung twice in the first place.

Having said that, I want to point out another item. The object of changing these rules is Parliament, not government, and that is a very important distinction. Parliament, oversees and generates the legislation and oversees government. That oversight function is something I want to mention later in my remarks.

Throughout all this I suppose we should not forget the Senate, which also has a legislative and oversight function.

In our House we have two structures that carry on this oversight function and the legislative function. One is this House of Commons and the other is our committees. In dealing with these proposed rule changes we have to assess the impact of these changes on the House, on committees, on the effectiveness of the legislative function, and on the oversight function.

The area I want to address more particularly today is the oversight function of committees. I have to note, sadly, that as we address these rule changes we appear to have abandoned consensus as a necessary part of the rule change process. Why is that consensus important? I would hope that all members would agree that it is important. It is because each of us in this House were elected as equals and we sit here as equals with the same goals. We are all in the same boat as members of Parliament.

• (1220)

There are some basic principles that do not always get articulated that lie at the root of this structure here in Parliament and why we have rules here. For example, what if the government proposed to reduce the number

of sitting days from the current approximately 175 down to, let us say, 10? We know that our Charter of Rights requires that Parliament sit a minimum once per year, I believe it is. Let us say the government proposed 10 sitting days per year. There really is not any other legal obstacle to the government doing that. I am not suggesting that the government would, but in the current rule changes the sittings are reduced from approximately 175 days down to about 135.

Those principles that underlie the rules in this place are a lot older than this House itself. I just want to articulate a few of them because I have not heard them read too often in the House. Most of us read them, but we have not memorized them. They are of course contained in *Beauchesne* and probably contained in other parliamentary documents going back years, but they are the rules. I quote:

The principles that lie at the base of English parliamentary law, have always been kept steadily in view by the Canadian Parliament; these are: To protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express his opinion within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

There are some buzz words that I know members on the government side like to hear, like rules that would prevent waste of time. There are words in there that I in opposition like to hear, words that would give me all the time I need to discuss and debate rule changes and legislation.

I know I have 20 minutes here and I accept that limit. I accept my limit and I am going to use most of it here. However, those principles are very important. I think that the government has abandoned some of those principles in proceeding the way it has with the rule changes, not just in imposing closure but in the way it has decided to proceed without consensus.

We have three functions here that permit our parliamentary democracy and our democratic country to carry on. They are the legislative, executive and judicial functions. That is pretty basic high school political science. Let us not forget that we in this country and others before us, our forefathers, had to fight for the legislative parliamentary function. We had to fight for it and our fathers died for that.