

Extension of Sittings

thought we were a bunch of nuts, and they were absolutely right. They said: "What the hell is going on in that House of Commons, letting the bells go on and on for 10 days?" So we made an end to it by agreement, and it serves the Government very well today that we cannot use that tactic, and I would not join in using that kind of tactic. If it were still in the rules, we could use it, so I am glad it is not in the rules any longer.

I do not understand the rationale of the Government. What does it really want? Does it want this kind of debate, so therefore I am helping it in its electoral strategy? It knows this resolution is offensive. It knows we are bound to fight. Therefore, it will say: "Look at the Opposition. It is delaying the important affairs of the state. Therefore, there is nothing else we can do but to call an election". It seems to me that this is linked with the Government's electoral strategy. But you, Mr. Speaker, do not need to join in, not you, Your Honour, because you are above all of this. You are above the Government.

● (1050)

I know that my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East wishes to participate in the debate. Faithful to what Your Honour has said, I will try not to be upset at 11 a.m. You have given us a signal that you want to render a decision, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure that you should. I am not sure that you should not.

Remember, you are the servant of the House and you have your authority and our confidence.

Mr. Speaker: I want the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) to know that I may have given a signal. It might have been some indication that there is an appropriate time to conclude the argument. I want the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis to know this. As long as the Hon. Member has something to say to me I will continue to listen. I do not in any way wish to interrupt the Hon. Member.

Mr. Prud'homme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before my colleague takes the floor I want to say that that is the beauty of this Parliament. I respect Your Honour. I have a lot more to add. As I said, I would have liked to quote extensively from the report of Mr. McGrath, who is today the Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland, but I will not abuse your indulgence, Mr. Speaker. I will sit down.

I will try to put to the Chair that the Government has acted too urgently. The Government is embarrassing our Speaker. I would like to speak for hours because I feel I am a friend of the court, as is said. As a friend of the court—a friend of the institution—it is my duty to say, Mr. Speaker, you have a tough decision to render. I hope that if this debate terminates at eleven o'clock, between 11 a.m. and 12 p.m. the Government will come to its senses and not pursue this unfortunate debate any further with respect to what it wants by a zap to change the rules of the House. Thank you for your kind patience, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear that no one in the Opposition is opposed to sitting during the summer to pass important legislation which will benefit the Canadian people, and that legislation must be passed during the summer. No one in the Opposition is opposed to doing that. But the issue here is whether every time the Government cannot operate within the permanent rules it can then go and changes the rules.

The reason in this case that it cannot operate within the permanent rules is that it was negligent in putting before this House certain legislation that it should have put before the House a long time ago.

With respect to the free trade legislation, the free trade deal was signed on January 2, 1988, yet it took the Government four and a half months, almost five, to put the legislation to the House, despite the fact that the free trade deal was being negotiated for the two previous years. Here we have a situation in which the Government, because it could not live within the rules due to its own negligence, tries to change the rules. That is like the Toronto Maple Leafs, because they cannot win at hockey with the ordinary rules set down for the game, cannot beat Edmonton, Montreal or Calgary, they want to change the rules so that they can win the game.

We have a set of rules. This set of rules was agreed to unanimously by the House a few years ago after long study, two long studies, one in the last Parliament carried out by Tom Lefebvre, who was Chairman of a committee on parliamentary reform. It made a report recommending certain changes to the rules to improve them. Then there was the committee under the chairmanship of the present Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland, James McGrath.

After these reports were put to the House we adopted a new set of rules. Here we have the Government, because it cannot operate under the rules decided upon by this House, wanting to suspend them. The worst part about this, as Hon. Members have said, is that the present rules provide that if it is necessary to sit during the summer, the Government can make an application to the Speaker and the Speaker will judge whether or not it is in the public interest that we sit.

Mr. Speaker, we in the Opposition accept that. We accepted those rules. We believe that the Speaker should have the right to accept a motion from the Government that we sit during the summer when it is in the public interest to do so. But we do not agree, and we think it is your responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to reject a motion such as this, simply to suspend the rules of the House because the Government cannot do what it wants to do under the present rules. I submit that is against all our democratic traditions.

I also want to read into the record again a statement by Sir John Bourinot, the great commentator on parliamentary practice, who said: