

*Government Orders*

On a number of occasions the usual spring prorogation was forgone in order to permit certain committee work to proceed, and the House adjourned pursuant to government motion over the summer.

Earlier in this century, the pressure of business led to late autumn openings of the session becoming more common, with a Christmas adjournment on government motion becoming the norm.

During World War II, and in the post-war years, sessions became longer and adjournments at Christmas, Easter and for the summer, on the basis of a government motion became a source of frustration because of their unpredictability. As early as 1947 there were proposals to establish a regular parliamentary calendar, but these were not acted upon. By the 1960s it was not unusual for the House to sit into August.

The adoption of the present supply system in 1968 with trimesters built into the calendar gave rise again to proposals for a set calendar for sittings. But the guessing game about Christmas, Easter and summer adjournments continued, and on occasion, such as Christmas in 1971, the normal adjournment was missed altogether. It took the long, acrimonious, pointless debates on the question of a summer adjournment in 1980 and 1981 to cause the House finally to act. It has been the conventional wisdom that it was the government that wanted to keep the House sitting to pass legislation and that the opposition wanted it to adjourn.

It is even said that for many years, Mackenzie King resisted improving the air conditioning in the Chamber because he thought the hot and humid Ottawa weather in June and July acted as a legislative catalyst.

This conventional wisdom, however, is based entirely on the wrong-headed, simplistic and anti-democratic view of Parliament as a legislative sausage factory. Any government as slap-happy over closure as this government naturally would be happy to keep the House open even less.

There is that much less time for the opposition to call the government to account. There would be fewer Question Periods to probe the government's inadequacies. There would be fewer opposition days to criticize the government and to put forward ideas. There would be less time for debate and discussion designed to inform the public. I would remind you that the public wish to be informed of all the facts, coming both from the government as well as opposition.

When the House sits less often, it is not the legislative function, it is the watch-dog function that is diminished. The bureaucracy gets its legislation and the public gets the wool pulled further down over its eyes. Ministers of the Crown then have the opportunity to vacate Ottawa and do what they do best, or what they think is best, and that is to be political.

The government makes the argument that members can better serve their constituents by spending more time with them.

If members are to understand fully what their constituents think about the issues of the day or what issues are of particular interest in their own regions, they obviously must spend a great deal of time in direct contact with their electors.

The present parliamentary calendar combined with the excellent facilities made available to members already guarantees that any conscientious member can keep himself or herself fully informed about the issues in their constituency.

Members have always had free postal privileges and for more than 20 years, free telephone privileges. In addition, members have up to 62 round trips by air each year that permits them frequent travel between Ottawa and their constituencies.

An effective member of Parliament does not need an additional eight weeks a year in the constituency to improve upon his or her services. What is needed is the opportunity to pursue constituents' problems or grievances both through private communications with the government and its agencies and through parliamentary processes, including questions, debates, private members' proposals and others.

A further eight-week reduction in the time that Parliament sits can only serve to diminish a member's ability to serve his or her constituency. The government is proposing to give members more time to hear about problems, while on the other hand less opportunity to do anything about these problems.

I heard the government House leader refer to the fact that members wanted to spend additional time with their constituents. I think what members of the general public would want, as was so ably demonstrated during the discussion with regard to the goods and services tax, is not necessarily for members of Parliament to spend more time with their constituents, but to listen to their constituents and thereafter act on their behalf. That is what they want their members of Parliament to do.