

regard to the business, we can reduce the length of the sessions of parliament and still deal with the public business effectively, we should do so.

In my opinion we would be more effective if we reduced the length of the sessions. I also think it would have this other advantage. If members were away from the house and in their constituencies longer between sessions this would be a better representative body than it is when we are here for so many months of the year. Hence from every point of view it seems to me that there is the strongest possible argument for reducing the length of sessions and reducing unnecessary debate as much as possible. I refer to unnecessary debate, not necessary debate.

I agree completely with the Prime Minister in his view that the most important of all our functions in this parliament is to uphold the right of freedom of speech for all our citizens through their representatives, so that we shall really have self government. That, of course, is the purpose of the House of Commons. It is not the duty of the House of Commons to govern. That is the duty of Her Majesty's ministers. In those famous words of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1877, it is the duty of the House of Commons to watch over the government in order to see that the government does that which the people want done, and only that. That is an extremely important function.

I also agree—indeed it would be rather ungenerous of me not to do so—with what the Prime Minister was good enough to say about the work of Your Honour's committee in the last two sessions of parliament. I think the experimental changes that we have made in the rules have resulted in distinct improvements in the procedure. I do not intend to take up any time going into the details of those changes. I certainly hope this committee will have time enough at the present session to recommend that some of those experimental changes be put permanently into the rules, as I think they have worked out in a way that commends itself to nearly all hon. members.

If it will not be taken amiss, I may say that those of us from this side of the house who have served on that committee always did so in the lively expectation that some of us would once more be on the treasury benches and hence felt that we ought to look at the rules from the point of view of both sides of the house. That is something that is very important to remember. We need to remember two things. In these modern days, with modern communications and modern menaces, we need to remember that there must be power in the government to act and

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to do so expeditiously in times of public danger, and that we cannot have a parliamentary system that is going to endanger our very lives. At the same time we must do nothing which will make the government so independent of parliament that the representatives of the people do not have over the government that constant control which is the glory of our British system.

Having said that, I come to the specific suggestion made in the Prime Minister's motion, in these words:

—and, in particular, to consider the desirability of repealing standing order No. 33 (closure rule)—

I do not wish to be a purist. If I had been drafting such a motion I am not sure that the precise word I would have used would have been "desirability". However, that is an unimportant matter. I agree with the Prime Minister. He may be surprised to find my saying this without any qualification. I agree with the Prime Minister—and I have no more desire or intention than he seemed to have to relive the past or to try to rewrite it or do anything of that sort—that, having regard to what has happened, I believe that no government in its senses would ever again use the existing closure rule in our book. I therefore do not see any sense in leaving it there. Moreover, it will be recalled that before the Prime Minister became Her Majesty's chief minister in this country, in the election campaign of 1957 he undertook if he formed a government to repeal the closure rule at the first session of that parliament. He gave a similar undertaking in 1958.

I am also not going to say anything more about that matter. However, since the government has twice received a mandate when that was a part of its program, it seems to me that it would be desirable just to repeal the rule right now. It does not seem to me that there is any need at all to send this particular rule to the committee. If it was not, it seems to me that the committee would then be freer to consider these other things.

Moreover, this was a matter of acute party controversy in the past. I do not think that is the situation now, particularly as in what I have just said I believe I speak for all my friends in the house. It seems to me that it would be preferable to have the motion extended and simply to repeal this rule.

There is another reason for that procedure, and again I do not wish to exaggerate this matter; I do not wish to make it seem too important. However, His Honour the Speaker, if this motion is carried, is to preside over this committee. If we can settle here in the house something that has been a matter of political controversy without