

Parliament

Mr. Speaker, the first thing that comes to my mind is the length of the speeches. I am not surprised at the silence of the Progressive Conservative members on this subject because they are the ones who most abuse our present rules, which allow members to speak for 40 minutes on the principle of a bill on second reading. Mr. Speaker, this is totally unacceptable. There are 265 members in the House, and after the next election, there will be more than 284 or 285. What should be considered at the second reading of a bill is the principle of the bill, and the Progressive Conservative members quite often use up 40 minutes each to talk systematically about the principle of the bill so as to delay referral to a committee and prevent the government from proceeding effectively with the implementation of its legislative program for the year. Mr. Speaker, there have been numerous and obvious examples of this in the last few sessions which should urge us to change promptly our procedure for the consideration of bills at the second reading stage. In that respect, Mr. Speaker, without muzzling the opposition, while allowing everyone to express his view freely and democratically since we are discussing only the principle of the bill, I believe it would be perfectly fair and so simple to limit the debate on second reading to a maximum of two or three speakers from each party, whose speeches should not exceed 15 minutes each.

We know that subsequently, in committee, we can hear several witnesses. We also realize that we can amend the bill and that after a comprehensive study in committee, it will come back before the House where we will study it at the report stage and, subsequently, at the third reading stage. During the last sessions and the last years, Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Conservative party has made an unacceptable and abusive use of the standing order which allows a member to take the floor for a maximum of 40 minutes. I think that for the sake of common decency and civism we should give to the highest possible number of hon. members the opportunity to express their views and use a much shorter time to comment on bills on second reading.

In that respect, I deplore the attitude of the Progressive Conservative party which has literally wasted the time of parliament and despised this institution.

Another change is also needed, Mr. Speaker, and as it is something constructive, it is not surprising if the Progressive Conservative party avoided saying anything on that subject. We should allow members to have more frequent contacts with their electors and, consequently, to reflect here a more complete picture of the people's need. For a long time, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have been asking for a more compressed, I do not say reduced, but compressed work week, with the same total number of working hours but compressed into four days to allow members to spend Mondays or Fridays with their constituents.

On various occasions I myself raised the issue in my speeches here. We have asked for the co-operation of all

[Mr. Pinard.]

members in changing to a four-day weekly schedule that would allow every member to go back to his riding, to meet with his constituents and also to have a much more regular family life. This has not yet come about but is nonetheless desirable. I am proposing it once more, most strongly and most respectfully.

Whatever the changes suggested, Mr. Speaker, two principles must be followed. First, truth must be respected. When I read a motion such as the one put forward today by the Progressive Conservative party, I feel it is odious. There is absolutely no truth in the three points made in that motion. It is absolutely not true that for more than 15 years the government has deliberately and steadily undermined the fundamental function of the House of Commons. It is absolutely not true that the government has refused to undertake a serious review of House procedures, and it is absolutely not true that the government has refused to consider the numerous worth-while proposals for reform. In 1976, I was sitting on the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. I co-operated in the development of the reports submitted by the three subcommittees, and I attended the last meeting of that committee in September, 1976, when the three reports were tabled and it was decided, as appears from the minutes I have here, and I quote:

● (2112)

[English]

It was agreed that the revised subcommittee report as printed would be referred to the various caucuses.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, when did we hear from the Progressive Conservative caucus, and when did we read their report on the worth-while parliamentary reform proposal the government submitted for study to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization? Never, Mr. Speaker. They prevented—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, the essence of the parliamentary system is control by the representatives of the people over the power of the purse so that the policies and activities of the state may be directed.

At the core of the situation we are facing, as was well stated by my hon. friend for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), is the necessity for a meaningful system of estimates. It applies to all public expenditures and *a fortiori* to large controllable expenditures including, for reasons I will go into later, military expenditures. The present system is at best meaningless and at worst a farce. It is, I think, a serious danger to our parliamentary system. It is possible to defeat any meaningful control of estimates if those estimates are so vague and general that no individual, whether in committee or in the House, can grasp or deal with them. Parliamentary control, as I have said, is