

Supply

mentioned a moment ago, smaller committees made up of 15 to 16 members are recommended. In its recommendation No. 22, the Progressive Conservative Party advocates eleven-member committees. We are prepared to consider the immediate implementation of this proposal. All we need to implement it without referring it again to committee is a little show of good will on the part of parliamentary leaders and all members.

Concerning the quorum, even the Progressive Conservative Party, along with the committee report, recommends that there should be no fooling around in the House, that the House should not be prevented from going about its business because some members have to answer phone calls or attend committee meetings. I think the bells should be allowed to ring for several minutes, maybe ten, before the Speaker can adjourn the House because of a temporary lack of a quorum. Another change that might be considered, if there is a consensus before the matter is again referred to committee, is to go to a four-day week, while keeping the same number of hours. At the present time, the House sits for twenty-seven hours a week. We could easily sit longer, for twenty-eight hours if necessary, which is just one hour more. I have a detailed breakdown of these hours spread over four days, which means that members could visit their ridings more often without exhausting themselves in the process and without risking their lives as has often happened to a number of members, and while being able to discharge their twofold responsibilities, that is, to represent and meet with their constituents and to come to the House and perform their legislative duties.

I have just mentioned four or five changes that have already been considered by the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization. Recommendations have been made and I feel it would be utterly ridiculous to refer them again for consideration. It seems to me that if the opposition is sincere, these changes could become effective before the summer recess. At the same time, we could consider asking the appropriate committee to prepare a more in-depth analysis of parliamentary reform in general, taking into account the studies I mentioned earlier.

Another possibility, considering the present situation, the attitudes we have seen during the past year and the opposition's destructive approach in the House, would be to create an independent committee made up of former Members of Parliament, who would examine the subject of parliamentary reform, unfettered by excessive partisanship, and would report within a specified period, probably before next fall, and refer the report to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization for—

● (1630)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order please! I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but his time is up. He may continue with the unanimous consent of the House.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There appears to be agreement for the hon. member to continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Pinard: Not to abuse the time of the House, I will conclude my remarks in less than three minutes.

Mr. Speaker, the avenues which I have just mentioned are available. If there is good faith on the side of the official opposition, some changes which have been scrutinized and analysed in depth already by a parliamentary committee could be implemented very quickly, or an independent committee could be asked to submit a report to the government, a report which would be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, which in turn could report to the House, and we could come to a decision on this here. That is another avenue I am willing to look into very seriously within the next few days. Nevertheless, except for these avenues which are available to us to streamline this institution, to render it more modern and efficient, to reshape it so that it could respond more readily to reality, there is something that matters more than a simple change of mechanism, Mr. Speaker, and it is a change in attitudes. Even if this institution was provided with the best Standing Orders in the world, even if we tried to correct all flaws so that Parliament could function better, even if we had a Standing Order book a mile thick and covering all imaginable angles, these changes would be to no avail if hon. members, especially those of the official opposition, did not change their approach from a to z. It will always be possible for a madman to throw a monkey wrench into the works or for a negative opposition to disrupt the orderly functioning of the system, whatever regulations we may adopt. What I am seeking, therefore, from hon. members from both sides of the House is not only a will to come to a consensus to bring about changes as soon as possible, but also an effort to change attitudes, so that the Canadian people may look up to this institution. Unfortunately, experiences such as those we have just lived through have a very negative impact not only on the Leader of the Opposition, but also on hon. members generally; and in the light of that unfortunate experience, I hope that in the foreseeable future and in keeping with the suggestions I have just made, we will be able not only to improve our Standing Orders, but to change some attitudes, so that Parliament may be respected, function and operate effectively, and that as servants of our people, we may be proud to serve the Canadian Parliament.

[English]

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, in speaking to this important motion—important in the context of what we have gone through for the past couple of weeks in the House of Commons and, beyond that, important to the future of parliamentary democracy in Canada—I want to address my comments to two concerns in the democratic system.

One is to have the opportunity of dealing effectively and promptly with the problems the nation faces; that is to say the right of a government to govern and to do so expeditiously. The other is to have the opportunity to make suggestions about