

Extension of Sittings

I also want to take a couple of moments to welcome to the House of Commons our new colleagues like the Hon. Member who just spoke. We are glad to see them with us and we look forward to working with them and against them over the next four years.

I would also like very quickly to say thank you to the people of the Peace country for returning me to this august institution for another term. I appreciate their vote of confidence in me.

I find the debate we are involved in just a bit unusual, Mr. Speaker. I do not know about you, but I watched the television on the night of the election and for the next couple of days and it was very apparent to me, as I think it was to all Canadians, that both opposition Parties indicated that the people had spoken. The Canadian people had expressed their confidence in this Government, but in addition they had expressed their opinion on the issue of free trade.

As a result, I think it was a fair assumption on the part of Canadians, as well as Members of Parliament, that we were going to proceed with the free trade debate, that things would go quite rapidly, and that we would all be home in time for Christmas, a time which is always so special for each and every one of us, a time we want to spend with our families and friends.

In reality, with a little bit of hindsight and a couple of letters that accidentally ended up in the papers, we suddenly find ourselves in a situation where we are forced to have almost a new hearing, a whole new process, on the question of free trade.

● (1330)

We heard comments this morning that the motion we are dealing with at this particular moment is Draconian, that we as a Government are terrible, and that we do not like the rules of Parliament. It has been said that we manipulate, twist and turn, that we do all these terrible things, and that we are hijacking Parliament. That is what the Hon. Member from Winnipeg said a little while ago.

However, Mr. Speaker, you know very well that in fact we are doing no such thing. That is nothing more than a bunch of rhetoric designed to stir up Canadians, just as much as the rhetoric we heard during the campaign was in no way based on fact but simply on emotion, which was the whole design of those particular remarks.

What about the motion that we are debating at this very instant? Is it really Draconian? Is it such a terrible document that we should all be living in fear that this

great democratic institution is in some way harmed and that democracy is suffering? Not at all. In fact, I think it was in the month of June in the previous Parliament that we had the almost identical motion before us. It is a motion that has become acceptable for a Government which has an agenda that it wishes to accomplish within a certain timeframe. It is a perfectly legitimate tool for a Government such as our own to use in these circumstances.

Let us for a couple of moments look at this particular motion. If we look at the first paragraph we see that what it really states is that this House, this Government, is prepared to debate the issue of free trade between now and Friday of next week. We are also prepared to come back and debate this issue the first day back after Boxing Day. In other words, we are prepared to make sure that the House sits and allows time for this issue to go through the process which the rules of Parliament make clear that this particular Bill has to go through.

What does the second paragraph of the motion do? It is very simple. All it does is extend the hours so that we no longer adjourn in the early evening but continue on until midnight of every night. What for? It is to allow the new Members to express themselves on the issue of free trade. We are not cutting off debate; we are expanding it. We are giving more time.

Mr. McDermid: Twenty-four hours.

Mr. Cooper: My colleague reminds me that it is a total of 24 extra hours. Does that sound like a Government that is trying to cut off debate? To the contrary, it sounds like a government that has an agenda, a government that has a goal and a purpose. That is why the Government was re-elected. It was because Canadians saw in this Government a government which knew the kind of leadership and direction that it wanted to give to this country. That is why Canadians expressed their confidence in us. That is why we are once again back on this side of the Chamber, rather than on the other side from where we hear some of this complaining.

The second paragraph allows for an extension of time to make sure that all those Members who wish to speak on the issue of free trade have that opportunity.

What does the third paragraph do? Is it Draconian? Is it a terrible paragraph that limits the rights of Members of Parliament? Does it somehow destroy and undermine our democracy? No. All it really does is state that we will continue with our regular midday breaks. Is that a terrible thing for the Government to do? How