

*Government Orders*

This is a crucial House of debate. This is where the duly elected representatives of the people of Canada come to reflect the views of their constituents and reflect their views as elected people regarding government policy and government programs. We were asked to study and to examine these government policies, programs and proposals, to examine their impact on different regions of the country and on different groups within our society, whether it was the free trade agreement or the goods and services tax. I refer to these as perhaps two of the largest and most important pieces of legislation we have had a chance to discuss in this House in the past number of months.

• (1800)

I think all of us, certainly the people of Canada, would recognize that it is very important we debate issues that the government of the day brings forward and that we examine legislation in detail, that we hold the government accountable for its deeds or for its actions or for the various acts of individual cabinet ministers. We have seen over the past number of months, as a result of that accountability, whole sets of ministers of the cabinet have had to resign or have seen fit to resign.

The government House leader spoke of the anger and frustration of the electorate and the fact that they hold members of Parliament or politicians, generally, in contempt. May I suggest that one of the many reasons for that is that people feel a sense of powerlessness. They have strong views on certain issues, whether it is the GST or the free trade agreement, and they bring it to their members of Parliament. They raise their issues at parliamentary committees or through other avenues, and the government totally ignores them.

When a government House leader says that it is important for members of Parliament to go back to listen to their constituents, we all know that constituents have been saying to members of the government for months and months on end: "Do not proceed with the goods and services tax", in every constituency across the country. Those of us in opposition have risen to reflect the views of our constituents. Many of us on dozens and dozens, and perhaps hundreds of occasions, have reflected their views that this tax is punitive, cruel and mean and is the wrong tax to be bringing in at this time.

I look across the aisle and I know that some of my friends on the government benches hold meetings in their constituencies and they are publicized. The media attends and reflects the mood of the constituents and the questions being raised. Once again, hundreds of thousands of people have registered their opposition to the goods and services tax or to the free trade agreement or to the changes to the unemployment insurance legislation, and the government just ignores their concerns.

**Some hon. members:** They are not listening.

**Mr. Riis:** No wonder people are frustrated. No wonder the electorate feels that the government does not care, because it has not shown in any way, shape or form that they, in fact, do care about what the people who elected them are concerned about.

I think people are saying that they are fed up with government arrogance. What they call this government, essentially, is an elected dictatorship, where the government is elected for a period of time and it feels it has the mandate to do anything it wishes. It does not matter that the programs and policies it is introducing was not discussed or raised during the last federal campaign.

As a matter of fact, I think it was the present Minister for International Trade who said, not many weeks before the last campaign that: "We could not tell the people of Canada what we were going to do, because if we did, no one would elect us". So, obviously, they fooled the people of Canada. They did not say: "If we are elected, we are going to introduce the goods and services tax".

So when the government House leader says that Parliament must be reformed, I must say that we can have all the rules in the world and unless the will is there, it is not going to change behaviour. We know that as parliamentarians. We can have all the rules and regulations of the House, but unless there is a will to make this place work properly, it will not work properly. We know that as parents. You can have all the rules for your children that you want, but unless there is a will, if you like, to do the appropriate thing, to act appropriately, to conduct your business in ways according to accepted traditions, it does not take place.

That is why I say, if the government is hoping that this type of parliamentary reform they are now introducing, and will eventually jam through the House of Commons, because again they will have to use the heavy hand of closure to get their way.