

• (1710)

The proposal for which there appears to be no explanation at all is the closing of the Notice Paper at 2 p.m. on Fridays. This comes in a package that proposes to keep the House open until 4 p.m. on Friday. Surely the Notice Paper ought to be open as long as the House is sitting. This proposal must come from the bureaucrats or politicians interested in political games. Nevertheless, does it add anything to the facilitation of government business? Does it add anything to the principles of natural justice where in any court of law, where before any tribunal, quasi-judicial or otherwise, one would be given an opportunity to have notice and the government wants to slam it down at 2 p.m. as opposed to 4 p.m.?

I want to be candid with all members of this Chamber. There are some proposals in this package that are either acceptable or could be acceptable in other circumstances. For example, the government is proposing that the introduction and first reading of all bills be deemed to have taken place after notice. That is, no vote be permitted on the introduction and first reading of any bill.

It has always been a principle of our party that every member of the House should have an unfettered right to bring in a bill. The first reading stage is merely an offer to print a bill and its adoption at first reading in no way implies approval of the substance of that bill.

The circumstances in which this proposal is being made, however, make it more difficult to support it. The government is attempting in this package to cut off as many vehicles as possible for which members may voice their constituents' discontent. When legitimate channels for grievances are blocked, the grievances will find less constructive routes for their expression.

On occasion forcing a vote on the first reading of a bill has been that route. The government in proposing to make that stage non-votable is blocking a comparatively harmless safety valve for the House of Commons. It will find that the grievances will be channelled elsewhere, quite properly and probably along an even less agreeable route.

A similar proposal is the provision enabling the government to do by notice what it heretofore has had to do by special order in arranging the presentation of the budget. The government's proposal is rather loosely worded and may lend itself to manipulation. I would not

Government Orders

want to leave the impression that the government opposite would want to manipulate the workings of the House of Commons. I would not want to suggest that, but I am sure other commentators would, Mr. Speaker, as I am sure you can refer to them at length. In itself it does not appear to impair the functioning of the House.

The government is also proposing some refinements of the process of recording divisions. It has only been a few years since the House began to defer divisions and it is natural that we should now be considering some revisions to this process.

Similarly, the specific ending of the possibility of repetitive ringing of bells when the House is involved with successive divisions merely reflects what has become the common practice of the House today. The whole process of recording votes in the House has been unsatisfactory to most members for some time. The McGrath committee recommendations were not fully acted upon and there have been other recommendations over the years that also bear further examination.

Finally, the government is proposing a process that would formalize pairing. In previous years pairing was quite common and members often took the time of the House to record them. My party, as of this moment, has not decided to accept the principle of pairing, but if other parties in the House so choose it is willing to let them record their pairs as they so desire.

The government package does contain a number of quite positive measures. First, there are refinements to the process of the adjournment debates, the so-called late shows. These refinements will allow more members to participate, will allow more current topics to be discussed, and will provide some resources for members to whom the government refuses answers to written questions on the Order Paper.

Similarly, the government has taken a positive step in proposing that motions dealing with Senate amendments to the bills be put on the Notice Paper. This will greatly facilitate the House in dealing with matters that are frequently quite complex and very technical.

Finally, the government is to be congratulated for continuing the process of modernization of the handling of the Private Members' Business. This began with the McGrath report and now the government seeks to make permanent the refinements recommended by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.