

*Government Orders*

There are many more expectations of Parliament than the processing of government legislation. It was the late Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker who put it so well when he said: "Parliament is not a sausage factory".

The government is presenting its package of so-called reforms less than five years after the House embarked on what the Hon. James McGrath called the most ambitious attempt to pursue major and comprehensive reform in the more than 100 year history of the Canadian House of Commons.

Perhaps Professor Franks' more realistic view on the subject commends itself to the House today when he said:

The record of reforms of the past decades is not one of unblemished success—Many reforms have not accomplished their stated objectives, while others have had unanticipated and undesirable consequences. Reforms that are not solidly grounded in reality are not likely to succeed. Quite the reverse, they are likely to create unlikely and unreal expectations which cannot be met. The resulting failures lead to disillusionment, pessimism, and a loss of legitimacy for the public and for the participants. Constant reform can become as much a habit as immobility and can be as inappropriate a response to problems.

It is with this in mind that I question the appropriateness of the government presenting this package of major changes to our procedure at this time. There has been no general blockage of the legislative mills in recent years. There has been no major blockages of these legislative bills or statutes that have come before us. Even the most offensive and most unpopular bills have been quite readily forced through the House using the existing rules we now have. Nor do I hear any crying out by the populace that their members of Parliament do not spend enough time with them. To the contrary, most of us find that our electors expect us to spend most of our time here in Ottawa attending to the affairs of the nation.

Quite frankly, I suspect that the government's real motivation in presenting this package at this time is merely a matter of what the members of the Cabinet perceive to be convenience. Ministers of the Crown are irked by having to attend the House and by having to answer for their inadequacies. Madam Speaker, I do not have to inform you of the numerous inadequacies on the front bench of that side. By having to report daily to the public who employs them, Parliament is an irritation to

these ministers of the Crown. In presenting this package of rule changes, ministers of the Crown are seeking relief.

We, on this side of the House, will not allow Parliament to become a subcommittee of Cabinet. We will not allow that.

The government forgets that the only source of its legitimacy is the House of Commons. It will find that its efforts to denigrate the institution further will only diminish what little public support it has left. It will soon be reminded of the wisdom of that old folks saying: "If it ain't broke don't fix it".

• (1630 )

Let us turn now to the specific proposals. First, there is the proposed new parliamentary timetable. There are two facets to the government's proposals, a revised parliamentary calendar and a revised daily sitting times.

Essentially the government is proposing that the House adopt an annual calendar that would see it sit for eight fewer weeks of the year. Eight fewer weeks of the year. The normal Christmas, Easter and summer adjournments would be lengthened. In addition to the mid-trimester breaks in the November and February, the House would have weeks off in May and in October. This would reduce the number of sittings per year to about the number common in the post-second World War period. It is interesting to look at the history of the House calendar to assess whether the government's proposals are much of an improvement to that time.

This is a matter that has gone through many changes. The one constant has been that the House, once called into session, has sat Monday through Friday. Until about 30 years ago, standing committees often met on Saturdays, and for the first 40 years after Confederation, a session typically began in January or February, and continued into the spring, usually until late May or June.

Usually the House would adjourn as a result of a government motion for a week or two to enable members to go home for Easter. On occasions, sessions would begin in November or December, in which case the government motion would provide a few weeks adjournment at Christmas.