

Law will never be strong or respected unless it has the sentiment of the people behind it. If the people of a state make bad laws, they will suffer for it. They will be the first to suffer. Suffering and nothing else, will implant that sentiment of responsibility which is the first step to reform.

I suggest the suffering that Parliament has endured these last two weeks is proof positive of that statement. Is it not time that we all got our act together and entered the real world to get on with the important business of governing our great country?

As a relative newcomer to the parliamentary process, I find that much of my time is taken up in reacting and not enough time is spent in acting or initiating. Because of this reactive nature of our process, I am sure the talents of many politicians in the House are wasted. Backbenchers on both sides of the House need to have greater input into the legislative process. Some might argue that a member has this opportunity in his party caucus. To a point this is true, but the operation of our party caucus is secret. I am not suggesting that we change this, but the public is not made aware of what goes on in caucus. As a result, it is left with a less than honest impression of what Parliament is all about.

• (2130)

An hon. Member: That is your caucus, not ours.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Burghardt: Again, I mention the antics of question period as seen and reported by the media. Obviously some members on the opposite side of the House are more attuned to the media than others, or perhaps the media is more attuned to those members. I guess that is where the news is being made these days. Yet far more time is being spent in the House on debates than on questions. Unfortunately, as we all know, the exodus of members, visitors and media from the chamber and its galleries after question period, leaving the House almost deserted, illustrates this point.

There are valid reasons for this. Debate is too long; it is too repetitive; it is too partisan on many occasions, it is too adverse and quite often it does not do the job. The opposition mentality of being against everything and in favour of nothing reduces the opposition's credibility as an alternative government. On the other hand, I feel the government ought to be concerned that its explanations of legislative proposals are not always communicated in a way that the public, and in some cases the House, can understand. To be honest, there are also grounds for suspecting that a government, because of the system, is sometimes forced to bypass Parliament to avoid delays that weaken Parliament as a whole.

I think it must be recognized that practical limitations on parliamentary involvement are necessary. For example, the Special Committee on Regulatory Reform, a committee which was made up of members from all parties in the House, on page 22 of its report on the subject of practical limitations on parliamentary involvement it reported the following:

We are convinced from what we have been told and from our experience working in this committee, that parliamentarians can contribute more to the regulatory process than they do at present. We must report, however, that the general support we found for greater parliamentary involvement in the regulatory process was tempered by the concern expressed by many witnesses that taking

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on additional functions could, in the long run, be counterproductive. We were cautioned against recommendations that would simply add to the present overload of Parliament and unjustifiably slow progress on the matters that require its approval. We recognize as well that enhanced accountability to Parliament would impose additional obligations on the Government.

Officials in almost all the departments we heard from characterized Parliament as a bottleneck. Significantly, this view was shared by many private sector interests as well. We were advised that some departments had been waiting for as long as four years simply to get bills of "lesser priority" before Parliament. In some cases, measures that might have reduced the burden of federal regulation on the private sector have not been implemented for lack of parliamentary consideration and approval. The parliamentary bottleneck provides further incentive for the government to include broad delegations of legislative power to ministers, regulatory agencies, and the governor in council in new regulatory statutes.

Nothing in reforms should prevent an opposition from opposing legislation before the House vigorously and objectively. But at the same time, reforms must permit a government to get a reasonable legislative program through Parliament. Perhaps a sense of purpose and direction in debate would make it more interesting for all members of the House, certainly for visitors in the galleries and, more important, the media. Normal speeches should be reduced from 40 to 20 minutes. This would make for better use of time in the House. It would give more members an opportunity to speak on a given bill. This proposal to reduce the time for speeches from 40 to 20 minutes has been mentioned many times and as late as this afternoon by the government House leader, and I know the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton has also mentioned it.

In my opinion, the purpose of parliamentary debate is to provide Parliament, and thus its members, with an opportunity to examine legislation before the House intelligently and objectively. This is a process that would create a better atmosphere between Parliament and the citizens of our country. It appears plain enough and easy to understand, but unfortunately, this is not the case. There is an increasing disenchantment with and skepticism of Parliament on the part of our citizens because of the very nature of the present system of rules and regulations which provide for procedural wranglings and delay, giving the impression, with all due respect, that we are nothing more than young school children at play. I believe there will be a greater decline in confidence placed in parliamentary government and little respect for parliamentary institutions if we do not change our ways.

I would like to mention the work of parliamentary committees. I feel parliamentary committees need to have greater control and input in examining a given piece of legislation. It has been suggested before, and I would concur, that our present committees are too cumbersome and that not enough members attend with the proper background and research required to investigate adequately, to scrutinize and criticize a particular bill before them. Too much time is spent in trying to score political points, especially if it is a committee which the media attends.

In many ways the failure, or whatever failure we are encountering in the House of Commons, has been to create a competent committee structure which can have a definite capability of affecting legislation. House committees seem to go mainly through the routine of looking into spending estimates. This point was mentioned earlier tonight. Important as