

*Extension of Sittings*

● (1030)

**Mr. Riis:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your interest in getting on with the business of the House, but I think we find ourselves at a crossroads today.

My thesis is that the Government is using its huge majority in the House of Commons to usurp the Chair. It is you who is also being challenged today.

As my friend, the Member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guibault) has indicated, the Standing Orders point out two very relevant areas. The first relevant area is in the beginning of the Standing Orders that all of us memorize and learn to use to make this a productive and positive place. It indicates that these Standing Orders, which came into effect and which we use in the House at this moment, are permanent. I do not know what you or other Members think "permanent" means, but to me it means permanent. It means we do not deviate from them unless there is unanimous consent to do so.

When we adopted these Standing Orders, it was done unanimously. There were discussions and consultations day after day, week after week, until there was unanimous consent in the House that these are the rules and regulations we wish to follow as parliamentarians.

Standing Order 4 lays out the calendar year. We agreed for the first time, on what I thought was one of the more sensible decisions taken by the House, to establish a parliamentary calendar year so that we knew with some precision when the House would sit and when it would not, when we would conduct the business of the people of Canada and when we would not.

It allowed for parliamentarians from all across Canada to make arrangements in their own constituencies and to be there to serve their constituents at a time when the House would be recessed or adjourned, as the case may be. This was in the Standing Order and was something that we agreed to.

Standing Order 5 states:

Whenever the House stands adjourned, if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the Government, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at an earlier time, the Speaker may give notice that being so satisfied the House shall meet, and thereupon the House shall meet to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time.

We saw this last summer. We were adjourned for the summer recess and the Government approached you and made it clear that it felt it was necessary to recall Parliament. You did that, Mr. Speaker. That is your obligation, your responsibility, and your right.

The House of Commons has given you that right in Standing Order 5. We felt that it was appropriate that you recall parliamentarians, not the Government but you in your position of representing all Members of the House. You are in a very exalted position, Mr. Speaker, because you are the first elected Speaker of the House. Every Member elected you to represent their interests and, similarly, to protect their privileges.

Now, the Government has decided to go past you, to ignore the Speaker's Chair and say that it is not prepared to go to the Speaker to request his decision to recall Parliament to do the business of Canada. It is saying that it does not have to go to the Speaker because it knows best. It has decided that it will extend the hours and, if necessary, will sit into July, August and the early part of September without asking the Speaker to decide, in spite of the fact that the Speaker represents all Members and all Parties in the House. The Government has decided to set aside the rules of the House of Commons. It has thrown them out. It has indicated on a number of occasions that it is prepared to abandon the rules.

But something more sinister is happening. It wants to abandon you and your Chair and the responsibilities and traditions of that Chair as well. That is exactly what this motion does. It sets aside your right to recall Parliament. It is called the dictatorship of the majority. It has decided to ignore the rules of the House of Commons, ignore the Speaker's Chair and do whatever it wants because it has the muscle to do it. The parliamentary bully boys.

We put our faith in the Speaker. That is what we did unanimously when we adopted the rules of the House of Commons.

We are at a very critical crossroads. If you permit this motion to stand in its present form, we are saying that we are setting aside the rights of the Speaker to decide how this place is run and giving that right to whomever is in the majority on the government benches, to do whatever they decide is in the best interests of the House of Commons. That is not what we were elected to do.

I submit with all humility that that is not what we expect the Chair to do as well. In conclusion, I do not think there is any way to justify proceeding with this motion in its present form. We will be awaiting your decision with some trepidation.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis):** Thank you for your patience, Mr. Speaker. You pointed out a few moments ago that you intended—you gave us a hint. You didn't say it was your final decision but you hinted that you might end this procedural debate at around eleven this morning. Mr. Speaker, I hope that was only a hint. When we say "Standing Orders", why do we have Standing Orders? Their purpose is to allow us to conduct our business in a matter that is harmonious, intelligent and civilized. In a family there are rules for conducting the family's affairs in an intelligent way. Companies have rules. Wherever people get together, there are rules. And we in the House of Commons, that court of last resort as Mr. Diefenbaker liked to call us on many occasions, and it is, in fact, just that. Because this is so important, we decided to have rules that would help us conduct the affairs of this country, of this nation of ours, of Canada, in a more intelligent, harmonious and less acrimonious fashion.