

Parliament

things that are important and serious should be debated without time limit, but the unimportant should be got through, and in the same vein I come back to estimates and say we should find a means whereby we deal each year with three or four or five departments picked by the opposition, and give them the works.

I must sit down, Mr. Speaker. I should just like to say that, important as I believe procedure to be, it is not the whole problem around here. A large part of the problem has to do with attitudes, with confrontation; another problem is lack of substance in the legislation the government brings forward. We could have the best rules in the world, but with a government which will not cope with unemployment or inflation, well, where are you? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this extra minute or two.

[*Translation*]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words on this motion. My remarks will be brief because the cold I caught prevents me from speaking for too long.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the Progressive Conservative party for having moved this motion, not because I support it in every respect but because it gives us an occasion to address ourselves to certain issues and draw the government's attention to some questions which are of an immediate interest to us. Of course, the motion blames the government for having "undermined the fundamental function of the House of Commons and its standing committees by imposing changes in the rules and procedures of this House and its standing committees calculated and designed to stifle or eliminate parliamentary examination and control of public expenditures resulting in the steady destruction of the parliamentary process." Naturally, like any motion, it is put in a rather strong way, but it gives us an opportunity to deal with matters which we cannot consider in other circumstances. It goes without saying that it is difficult for this government as it was for any previous government to give satisfaction to everybody, politically speaking. We must realize that ours are political formations which are generally more concerned with making political gains than with administering the country properly. I feel this is the first area for which we can heap reproaches on one another, and that we should make a concerted effort to think more of the people we are here to serve, rather than of those who are likely to cast their votes in our favour.

● (1652)

I should like to deal first with the inadequate time planning and distribution in the House. The government seems to operate in a haphazard way, especially in the planning of the legislation which is to come before the House. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) remarked a while ago, it would be very useful—I do not think I am asking for the impossible—if at an early stage of a new session we could obtain the list of the main bills, leaving out all

secondary bills, in their order of introduction in the House, which would make it possible for us to really get ready to debate them. I suggest that this would reduce time spent in discussions. What procedure are we using today? Early in the session, the government appears to be somewhat at a loss as to the bills it wants to introduce. For the first months that went on to such an extent that some days, quite frankly, the government would find it impossible to keep hon. members, busy so unpredictable was the business of the House, not only for this year but I am referring to the 16 years I have been here. So much so that the government would be embarrassed after we had discussed a bill so rapidly that they had nothing left for us to do the day after.

I think that with perfect planning for every day of the session, those minor, unimportant bills—since among the 30 to 40 bills we might pass during a session there are always 20 to 25 which are rather unimportant and that is why we call them minor—could be deferred till the end of the session. But it is the contrary that happens. Indeed it is at the beginning of the session that all those minor bills are put before us whereas major pieces of legislation are reserved for later on, those precisely we would like to discuss a little longer. But no, they are introduced when we are in a hurry, ten days before the end of the session and particularly before holiday breaks. Yes, just before holidays they would push four, five or six bills and sometimes even some which had never been presented during the session.

They would be presented to us four or five days before the end of the session and we had to adopt them unless we wanted to be deprived of vacations. We were like schoolchildren threatened by the teacher to forgo holidays if they did not do their homework. Well, I think this is not a very serious attitude for any government. The government should think more, give more precise direction to its efforts and be convinced that it is dealing with mature people who come here to do their work, but who must do it as well and as fast as possible in order to give more time to their riding. This question has been raised on numerous occasions. In the 16 years I have sat here, Mr. Speaker, I think we never had enough time to work in our constituency. At Christmas and Easter, we only have a few days—barely enough to get things going—and then we have to get back here. Moreover, summer periods have often been shortened. I have always maintained in this House that an hon. member should at least spend three months in his riding because his work in this regard is not only here but also in his riding. He must meet his constituents to explain to them the government policy.

When the House sits 11 months out of the year, how can one be expected to spend two or three months in his riding? That point should be studied and improvements should be made. Here is the second point, namely the way in which the government introduces bills, and here I am thinking of omnibus bills. One never heard of omnibus bills when I first