

Supply

impression that the Conservatives, when they were in power, never issued an order in council. Well, we all know that they did, and I became so annoyed listening to the sanctimonious utterings of the Leader of the Opposition today that I checked with the Privy Council on the Clark government's record on orders in council. They have complained about the volume we have produced. Well, they were in for nine months and how many orders in council did they grind out? One thousand and fifty-one.

An hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Smith: So, having listened to what they have had to say in recent days about orders in council, I think they should literally be ashamed to stand up on their feet and bring that up again. I hope it has now been laid to rest because they will not get off the hook with that red herring anymore.

Mr. Mayer: You guys had 3,700 last year.

● (2030)

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak very briefly about one aspect of parliamentary reform which I feel quite strongly about. There are two points I wish to make. If there were one quick change which I think would be legitimate, given the experience of the past couple of weeks, it would be that a motion to adjourn the House, once moved, if not voted on by the automatic adjournment hour of the day on which it is moved, should become void. This is because if an adjournment motion were carried, the work of the House would be terminated for that day only in any event. If the motion cannot be brought to a vote by virtue of the fact that one whip on one side of the House has decided to stay out and break the normal practice and tradition, putting the Speaker in an awkward position, as has been the case in recent days, I believe that that is really an abuse of the tradition. I do not think anyone would be ill served by a change which simply stated that if a motion to adjourn the House has not been voted on by the time of the automatic adjournment hour of the day in which it is moved, the motion should become void. I do not think anyone would consider such a change in the Standing Orders to be an abuse.

The tactic which was used in recent days could still be used. However, hon. members would have to get up and move that motion every day. If they did that, the scrutiny and the spotlight of public opinion would prevent them from doing this very often.

What I would really like to speak about is the whole subject of committees, particularly special committees. I have had the opportunity of chairing one of these committees, which I am still chairing. It is the Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped. We have a seven-member committee comprised of four government members, two Conservative members and one NDP member. First of all, I would like to say that I really believe there is a lot of merit in having smaller committees. I think that what happens is that a greater commitment to the subject matter is developed among the members. I think one agrees to serve on a special committee only if one has a genuine interest in the subject matter of that committee. As a

matter of fact, when those six special committees were set up a couple of years ago, it was stated in the order of reference that the membership of the committee could not be changed without a House reference. This meant that there was no revolving door. In the larger standing committees, whenever a vote comes up, the troops from either side will come in and look to their leading spokesman to tell them which way to raise their hands.

I think there is much merit in the concept of a smaller committee. I suspect that if we had smaller committees around here, and if members served perhaps on just one or two committees at the most, we would find that members would develop a much greater commitment to participation in those committees.

Our particular committee travelled across the country. We held hearings in 18 different locations. We divided ourselves into two parts. We heard over 600 witnesses. I think that all of us who served on that particular committee have found a lifelong interest in and commitment to improving the lifestyle of the disabled in this country. It was a very moving experience. It would also be fair to say that it familiarized us with the subject in a way which has enabled us to make a contribution to Parliament, because we find that members from that committee tend to ask questions in Parliament and tend to oblige the government to continue to focus on our various recommendations. I think that all of that is a good thing. I personally feel, although not everyone is of this viewpoint, that the style and the format of report which we used was a welcome change. Quite frankly, many parliamentary reports published in the traditional way are about as interesting to look at as the phone book. They are deadly dull. We used a format which included a number of photographs, a headline style, a punchy style, with the result that many people wanted to read it.

I simply want to make those comments for the record to indicate my very strong support for the concept of special committees. One of the most enjoyable and satisfying things that I have ever done in my life was to become associated with the work of that committee. I am making this contribution as a private member in the hope that when the various aspects of parliamentary reform are reviewed by the House leaders, serious consideration will be given to continuing the opportunity for special committees to do the very fine work they have done in the last couple of years.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to participate in this debate on the motion of my leader. I thought he gave one of the more constructive speeches of his career this afternoon when, in a very even way, he pointed out some of the problems of this institution and suggested some remedies. We have just come through a very difficult time in this institution. Frankly, I do not think there is one member on either side of the House who was very gleeful while listening to those bells. Other hon. members have spoken on parliamentary reform tonight. The hon. member for