

Government Orders

Maastricht treaty, five hours and 15 minutes is considered insufficient.

An hon. member: Nine days lost.

Mr. Andre: At committee there was 11 hours and 45 minutes of discussion and nine days offered by the government which were turned down by the opposition—nine extra days of committee meetings. There was ample opportunity offered for detailed study.

The hon. member also mentioned that the Standing Orders of 1991 were not agreed to by the opposition. Standing Order 78(3) in play today goes back to 1969 which, if I am not mistaken, precedes everybody who is currently in the House.

I am sorry, there is one member who was here in 1969.

An hon. member: The loud guy in the back row.

Mr. Andre: Sorry, there are two members.

To suggest that Standing Order 78(3) is somehow an invention of this government is to misrepresent the situation.

Finally, the hon. House leader of the Liberal Party raises a point that I think we do need to consider. That is the 73 report stage amendments.

We have to consider it in this context. The intent of the rule changes that were brought in was that legislation would be given second reading in the House, it would go to committee for detailed study, come back for report stage and third reading. The intent was that amendments to bills should be discussed in committee. There they could be looked at in detail, they could be discussed, debated, voted on and dealt with.

The practice which is observed here is that the opposition members on the committee simply refuse to allow the putting of any amendments, wanting to bring them into the House, thereby negating the value of the committee study as it is currently structured.

We might want to look at some changes to our Standing Orders to make committee study much more useful of members' time than it is currently turning out to be because of the practices that are being used.

In conclusion, I repeat that any reasonable person will find that proper procedures have been followed. This motion is totally in order and we ought to proceed with holding the vote so the important debating points that hon. members opposite want to make during report stage and third reading can be made.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): A very short point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was a member here when certain rule changes were brought in. At that time Parliament did live and there was honest debate on controversial subjects. Mr. Speaker, as you undoubtedly know, and certainly the Table will know, the government House leader is right on the last part of what he said.

Now that I am on the opposition side, I wonder about moving amendments in committee because then you cannot move them in the House where you get the attention.

I never agreed more with the hon. member for Kamloops than on this issue. This bill was introduced on June 23, the day the House of Commons adjourned for the summer recess, and notwithstanding what was said by my hon. friend and former brotherly-like comrade, the member for Etobicoke, who talked about the summer, we all know that this past summer was involved in constitutional discussion.

Parliament came back on September 17 and that is when debate first started on second reading for one hour and 50 minutes.

We then adjourned because of the referendum, which was a unique period in Canadian history when the focus was on the Constitution and what was happening to Canada. There was no attention at all to the drug patent bill.

We had the referendum. We all know the results of October 26. This Parliament came back on November 16 and the bill was discussed for two days. Closure was put on the first day of debate, November 16, after two hours and 25 minutes of debate. The second day, November 17, debate was for three or four hours, for a total—and the government House leader has it wrong, to be fair—of eight hours and 40 minutes of debate at second reading of Bill C-91.

Mr. Speaker, in the sense of Parliament that used to be, if there ever was a bill that needed more focus from Canadians without the distractions, important as the Constitution was, that is Bill C-91. If the government is