

Government Orders

What are these changes? One that I think is totally devastating to opposition and very repugnant is the proposal to reduce the numbers of debate on the throne speech down to six from eight. This gives the opportunity to all members of the House, the government members as well as opposition members, to have some input into the plans of the government for the future. It is the first opportunity at each new session of Parliament for members of Parliament to analyse what is the government's proposal for that next sitting. It is the opportunity for the member to get on record, on behalf of himself and his constituents, in the discussions of where this country should go into the future.

The next suggestion is to cut down again the numbers of debate on the budget from six to four. Once again the budget debate provides the opportunity for all members of Parliament to speak on future government projections for the following year, where the money is proposed to be spent and where the money has been spent. When we cut that down and speak in numbers, six to four days, it does not seem all that bad; but when we think about the number of people involved, it substantially cuts down the opportunities of those members to speak.

Turning to the proposal to cut down speeches from 20 minutes to 10 minutes, I think most people in this House know that in 10 minutes you really only have the opportunity of putting forth your preamble and maybe getting to some salient points; but you have very little opportunity in 10 minutes to flesh out your arguments. However, 20 minutes with a 10-minute question and answer period give the member an opportunity of adequately expressing once again his constituents' ideas, his ideas, as well as putting forth perhaps some platforms of groups from whom he has heard within his riding or within his critic area, if he is an opposition member, or within his interest groups, if he is a backbencher of government.

What happens if we also cut down the question and answer period? I personally know that is a section of the debates which I treasure and treasure dearly. It gives me the opportunity of sitting in the House, listening to members' speeches and responding to those speeches with more ideas from my riding or more ideas from my past knowledge or from the history of Canada to try to bring out from other members some of their thoughts. It allows us again an extra thrust that we do not get.

Further, the one thing that upsets me as any, I suppose, is the thought that although I can see the government's point of view and the government backbenchers' point of view in wanting to have scheduled one-week periods in which to work in their ridings—and I do not deny that that on the surface is an excellent idea—it is very difficult, particularly from the perspective of one who lives in the interior of the province of British Columbia, to travel back and forth trying to get into your riding on a regular basis to do the job or the second part of the job that you as a member of Parliament are expected to do: the job in the riding of looking after the case work and looking after the public relations aspects of this job.

The down side of that is the fact that it will cut substantially the number of days that this government is held accountable to Parliament.

As I understand it, the proposal is to drop from a 175-day year to 135-day year. Although with the addition of hours the parliamentarians will spend approximately the same time in Parliament, they will not be given the opportunity of those additional days to pose questions to ministers of the Crown. They will not have the opportunity of requesting things from the minister. They will not be able to put forward their suggestions and their questions to the press, to the media.

All in all I would suggest, again as I started out, that this is a cutting back of democracy. People want change, but they want change to a more democratic society, a more democratic Parliament. These Standing Orders are a further whittling away of that democracy and cannot proceed as such.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this day.

The House took recess at 1 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.