

*Government Orders*

• (1620)

The Financial Administration Act was another piece of legislation where members of the Official Opposition co-operated with the government. The passage of the Bretton Woods agreement amendments was another piece of legislation we adhered to.

With the legislation that has come forward from the government, we as the Official Opposition have been reasonable, have been respectful of the majority opposite. We have stated our case and in many instances we have lost the battle in terms of the democratic debate and subsequently, of course, the vote.

I think the record has to show that, notwithstanding the co-operation, we did demonstrate clearly and unequivocally on the floor of the House of Commons that when it came to the proposed rule changes, since assuming my position on or about February 1, 1991, and thereafter in subsequent meetings both privately and public, I have indicated quite clearly to the government members that in no way could we agree with the contents of the proposed rule changes. That is not to suggest that there were not discussions which followed thereafter. In fact, there were discussions that followed thereafter. There was a working committee to look at some of those proposed new changes.

My colleague from Kingston and the Islands has done a superb job, not only with regard to the rule changes, but other matters as it affects the business of this House.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Dingwall:** I had some discussions with the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. I am a bit surprised and in some respects quite offended at the government House leader suggesting and implying that somehow we consented to these rule changes and then at the ninth hour backed off. That is not the case at all.

We said early on, clearly and unequivocally, that we were opposed. Yes, there would be some discussions that would take place with this working committee, but let it be said once and for all that there was no agreement either by myself nor by my predecessor with regard to these proposed rule changes.

I think the record ought to show that very, very clearly, so that no member in this House can have the interpretation which I believe the government House leader tried to imply in his remarks.

I note that he is not here and perhaps it is not appropriate for me to say that in his absence. Nevertheless, I say that in all sincerity.

The presentation by the government House leader endeavours to present the government's amendments to the Standing Orders as being necessary to make Parliament, as he says, "more efficient". The minister might well have borne in mind the words of Professor Franks, the founding chair of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group when he wrote, and I quote:

Reform of Parliament is not simply a technical matter of making Parliament more effective and more efficient, although it is often presented in those terms. Reform is also a question of the purposes for which political power is to be used in Canada and how various interests and viewpoints succeed and fail to influence political choices and outcomes. The balance between Parliament and government affects the balance between an emphasis on the particular and on the general welfare. There are many collective public goods that can only be provided by government and will only be adequately ensured if a strong voice defending a general public interest is heard in politics. Fundamental and often competing goals of equality, freedom, justice, private and public goods and economic growth and stability must be balanced in the political process.

The government's proposals are heavily weighted towards what it considers to be parliamentary efficiency and effectiveness. The government, unfortunately, has lost sight of the whole picture. There is more to Parliament than the legislative efficiency of its workings.

First, Parliament provides, through the electoral process, the political legitimacy of any government. Second, it provides government with the resources necessary for governing: the authority, the funds, the dollars and the cents if you will. Third, Parliament exists to make the government behave, to be the public's watchdog. Fourth, it is an important function of Parliament to provide an alternative government, that is, to enable the opposition to present its case to the public and to the country. Fifth, Parliament provides a forum for the development of political leadership. Finally, Parliament provides a focus for political communications when its discussions express the mind of the people, informing both society and government of grievances and problems.