

• (1540)

That was very good and the government of the day should be complimented on that. There is no doubt that I share the views of members basically on all sides. Certainly the government House leader in his opening statement, and I think the opposition leader too, talked about the deplorable state of Parliament and/or the politician. Let no one think that because one is wearing a particular party stripe one is going to avoid absolute disfavour in the public mind of that generic term the politician.

I don't care whether you are a Tory. I don't care whether you are a Grit. I don't care whether you are an NDP. I tell you, in terms of the three national parties, never for a variety of reasons has their opprobrium been lower in the public mind and frankly I do not know of any rule changes that are ever going to improve that situation.

My belief has been and still is that you can pervert or prostitute any procedural rule unless there is some good faith and respect between the parties involved. It is unfortunate what has happened in this forum over a period of years. It is not through the advent of any one government. I have been here for 25 years and I can say that I have seen a decline in the respect among members on all sides.

Yes, we have to have our floor fights and debate issues when we differ. There are exceptions—and I can see some right here in the Chamber today—where you can have your floor fights and debate with intensity, vigour and sometimes some logic, and yet you can still respect that member off the floor. Often there was more done off the floor in sort of agreements. They can talk about the old boys' club or name it what you will, but I can tell you that is when things really started to get done and helped the procedures of the House by the respect in a collective way that all members had. That is sorely missing, and rules changes are not going to change it.

Time moves along pretty fast here. In fact one of the rules changes which gives me concern is that we are going to be reduced to 10 minutes after a certain five-hour period, I gather. Ten minutes for me is just an introductory preamble in so many cases, so I don't really know how I am going to be hamstrung once those rules come into effect.

I have listened and everyone has spoken sincerely, but I really have been bothered to hear some of my colleagues talk about the state of Parliament and how this

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potential package of rule changes is going to be a further rape of Parliament. We are going to reduce the time for the Speech from the Throne and the time for the budget debate. Opposition days are not going to be quite as numerous.

Well, I am going to make a confession. I don't expect any member in the opposition or the government to make a similar confession. There were days when we were in opposition—and we had a pretty good opposition that knew what it was doing—and we had to fumble around in the latter stages of supply to get a proper topic to throw before the House, to fill the calendar, to have a debate.

I would venture to say, if members looked in their mirrors and did not have to confess publicly, that every one of them have sometimes wondered: what in the name of salvation are we debating this topic for, or why are we filling the calendar with this issue when in effect we could perhaps be doing more constructive things to help the nation?

I thought supply days would be the greatest thing since sliced bread. There are some good purposes for it. We have to have supply which, as everyone has said, is the whole reason we are here. There is no doubt that the whole element of accountability in supply of a massive government of no matter what stripe is very difficult for average members to get their teeth into. That is why I think committees are going to have to have perhaps a more powerful role so that they can analyse those estimates. Whether it is committee of the whole House which became a charade or even now with the present committee structure, there are many imperfections.

It is because there is not collegiality and the common respect of members prepared to put aside from time to time their partisan stripe that I think this place has been affected more than by any rule changes in the past or in the present.

I want to come to the package. I cannot go through it all because of the time limit, but I really want to stress one point. I know what is going on here. A lot of members want to speak. Perhaps they want to make sure the government invokes closure. I am going to surprise them, because I think I am correct. There is not going to be a big hullabaloo outside if the government invokes closure after so many days of debate on these rules. This is a very internal debate. It is not going to excite the public. It is not that there are not good things that should be said, but if there were ever an internal debate it is on House rules.