

*Auditor General*

A book was published this year called "The Canadian Legislative System", written by Robert Jackson and Michael Atkinson. In that book they deal with the amount of time and effort that goes into the passage of legislation. Let me quote from the book at page 157 as follows:

Allan Kornberg's research demonstrates clearly that Parliament has been working longer to achieve less in the twentieth than in the nineteenth century. Table 3 shows that the lengths of Parliaments and the number of sitting days have both increased while the percentage of bills introduced and passed has declined. The average number of bills passed per day between the first and eighth Parliaments was 1.39, but between the 19th and 27th Parliaments the performance ratio fell to .54.

That is a disgraceful record. They used a second example on page 162, Table 4, in which they gave the years of the session, the average number of sitting days, the average number of public bills enacted, the average number of days to pass a bill, the number of pages of enacted legislation and the average number of pages passed per sitting day. Let me take the latter statistics and run down the table for you.

The base period used was 1945-1947 when there was 4.3 pages of legislation passed per sitting day; in 1953-1957 it was 3.7; in 1964-1968 it was 3.5 and in 1968-1972 it went to 3.7. That is quite a decline from 4.3 in the 1945-47 period. Of course the number of pages does not give any idea of the quality of the legislation, but I think it is symptomatic to note that in this particular session it has taken us an average of three and one half sitting days to pass each bill that has gone through the House of Commons. Indeed, if one looks at the size and the complexity of the legislation, we would have to admit this is probably a disgraceful amount of time to spend in the House of Commons on average pieces of legislation.

What we should be focusing on in the House of Commons are those pieces of legislation which are clearly important, and we should be spending more time in committee on those pieces of legislation that are obviously more of regional and less of national interest.

One of the things we have to do is learn to examine our operations from the point of view of time. For example, we should have committees travelling more, but we cannot operate the committees and the House of Commons with the existing committee system if we have them travelling. The fact of the matter is that the machinery we have set up in the House of Commons requires a great number of members of parliament to be present, and when we send out a committee, and right now we have the committee on immigration travelling, we immediately see the very large holes in the ranks of all parties.

We should be re-examining the way in which we do our business so as to provide time for all committees to travel, so that the committee work can be done and members can get out to their constituencies. Right now those of us who have to go some distance to our constituencies find it is becoming impossible to keep in touch with our constituents as much as we would like to do that.

I do not believe this can be called one of the vintage sessions of parliament. I think the House of Commons has been relatively dull. It has not produced much in the way of debate. It is important to realize that the House of Commons is perhaps more of an opposition forum than it is a forum for backbenchers on the government side. Nonetheless, both sides have an obligation. But this House

of Commons has not been good. I believe there are a number of reasons for that, and the first is that we have gone through two elections, four years of politics, and most of us are trying to recover from the experience. There are leadership problems and changes taking place in three of the four parties.

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The economic problems we have to face are so overwhelming that few countries have been able to find a way out. Members are frustrated because there do not appear to be any easy nostrums available to solve the problems. The last reason is that there is a feeling that the House of Commons is not operating as an effective unit in itself.

I believe that the House of Commons has an important role to play as a deliberative and legislative body. As a deliberative body it should be discussing more often the issues of our times. We do not really do that at the present time very well because, with the nature of our parliamentary system, we tend to be dealing with legislation which is one or two years old. We just do not process the material in the proper way. It lies around and waits and waits, until finally it goes through after one or two sessions. We have bills that have been hanging around for two or three sessions which are still not passed.

The debates that take place in the House of Commons tend to be a farce. Why? Because as soon as a bill is introduced, the minister speaks, perhaps the parliamentary secretary speaks on this side, members on the opposite side speak, and we may have a debate which takes place for one or maybe two days. After that, the debate becomes a monologue because we on this side are told to sit down, not say anything, and try to get the bill through. That means that for the last four or five days of the debate on that particular issue very little is heard from the government side because, if we stand up and say something, members opposite tend to take that as a starting point to continue and go on and lengthen the debate. We must change that because if the House of Commons is to be meaningful there must be debate and not monologues. That means there will have to be an acceptance on the other side that debate ought to take place and that we ought not to have a series of monologues.

Members opposite complain bitterly that they are not reported on what they say in the House of Commons. Of course they do not get reported, because to get reported in the House of Commons there has to be clash. We do not have clash because members opposite do not want to accept any kind of programming or any kind of limitation that would in fact lead to the kind of clash, healthy debate and exchange of ideas that would be healthy and useful for this organization.

Before my time is up, Madam Speaker, I want to run through a series of other suggestions I have concerning possible changes. First of all I think we must focus on working on some kind of allocation of time procedure, not a guillotine but a method by which members opposite are brought into the final discussions when time is allocated on legislation. I believe this is essential if the House of Commons is to become a forum for debate and exchange of ideas, instead of witnessing the kind of sorry situation that debate now passes for in the House of Commons.