

*Standing Orders*

Whip. They both tried to explain that they want to improve the procedural package concerning the House of Commons.

Quite clearly, when you scrutinize this resolution you see that the Government intends to substantially—radically, in fact—change the procedures of the House of Commons, not in keeping with the effort put forward in recent months by Members of Parliament on both sides of the House who have served on committees and reviewed the rules of the House of Commons. The Lefebvre committee, the McGrath committee and more recently the Cooper committee have done important work in consultation with representatives of both sides of the House. Indeed, we could say that the report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, chaired by James McGrath, was a report arrived at through consensus, through diligent work by members of the three Parties represented in the House of Commons with a view to bringing forward a balanced package that favours not exclusively the Government but favours equally the Government and the Opposition, and, above all, favours parliamentarians. It was an effort to enhance the role of the private Member.

From the report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons let me cite what a new Member of Parliament, the Hon. Member for Calgary South (Mrs. Sparrow) said:

As a new Member of Parliament, I do not know the mechanics of this institution as well as some of my colleagues. I am absolutely amazed at how little input private Members have into the formulation of legislation, policies and/or regulations. It appears to me that most of the time we are told what a minister will be announcing in 48 hours and we do not have access, any means to study or contribute or change the finished product. But Members must go to their constituencies to explain and support the decision of the government. Sometimes this is extremely difficult.

These are the words of the Member for Calgary South, a member of the Government, who was expressing her view on entering Parliament and hoping for radical change in the way Parliament operates.

In the early stages, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), the Government House Leader and the Government sustained and supported the McGrath report and tried to implement it, although I have to say there are a number of important issues that have not yet been dealt with that have been referred to the new Board of Internal Economy, which issues until dealt with, will not make for a major change in our parliamentary procedures.

A significant step in the right direction has been taken so far, but there is another major step to be taken on which the Government is very hesitant. Not only is the Government not ready to go further in implementing the McGrath report, but it has just made an about-face with the motion introduced by the Government House Leader. In fact, these proposals, as we see them, coming as they appear to do in isolation from the philosophical framework which guides the reform process, reflect the need of the Government House Leader. They reflect exclusively the desire of the Government, frustrated in implementing some of its legislation, to take control of Parliament, to take control away from the back-benchers on

both sides of the House, to take it away from the Opposition and basically impose *le baillon* to prevent the Opposition from speaking out and speaking out legitimately against some of the measures which the Government is introducing. This is regrettable.

One may look at some of the changes the Government wants to make and one could sympathize with the desire of the Government to re-address some of the anomalies that exist in Routine Proceedings. One can see here obviously that the Government is feeling the frustrations of excessive dilatory tactics that have been used recently by the New Democratic Party. The Government is, therefore, anxious to assert its control of the House. Unfortunately, we have to ask ourselves if this control is coming at too high a price. Does this not come at a time when, in a spirit of reforming Parliament and giving more authority to the private Members, the Government is seizing the passage of permanent new rules to give itself some authority? That is to a certain degree frightening. I refer to the decisions of the Government without any consensus, without any appropriate consultation and agreement with the opposition Party, whether it be the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party, to go ahead and change substantially some of the procedures to which we have been accustomed, in particular, our dealings with third reading stage. The decision of the Government to curtail debate on third reading in the way it wants to do it is unacceptable. The decision to amend Standing Order 117 is, to me, unacceptable. The decision to change unilaterally Standing Orders 13, 19 and 48 is also unacceptable.

● (1630)

I would like to remind Hon. Members and members of the Government in particular that the consensus arrived at in the McGrath report to do away with bell-ringing is a prime example of how Members on both sides of the House could put their partisan approach aside and try to work out procedures that would be in the best interests of good order in Parliament. I accept without any hesitation that the Government has a legitimate point in trying to redo Routine Proceedings and in trying to find ways to implement certain timetables for legislation. However, to do so unilaterally and without proper consultation and appropriate consensus sets a very, very bad precedent. On one hand, the Government has every right to want its legislation passed, but it must accept on the other hand that the Opposition has the right to fight as much as possible under the rules of the House of Commons against legislation the Opposition thinks is unacceptable.

The way the Government is trying to curtail debate on second reading, at report stage and on third reading is, to me, too much. If these rules are accepted, there will be the possibility of a Minister rising in the House and, without any notice, deciding that his legislation, which he thinks is good although all members of the Opposition and a large segment of the population are against it, will pass. He will move a motion that will be debated for only two hours and will preclude the continuation of debate at report stage and at third reading of