

Business of the House

belongs to all its Members, not only to those who may be supporting the Government until the next election. If the Government wants to proceed in a reasonable way with a program of legislation, then it should operate so that it can get the co-operation, in a constructive way, of all Members, including members of the opposition Parties. If it is showing a willingness to do that, then it may be possible to make some progress, especially if that progress is intended to be within the rules of the House, and if the Government is going to give up its idea of throwing the rules out of the window because it cannot live or operate within those rules.

Last Friday I sent the Government a letter, which I made public, in response to the Government House Leader's letter which was attached to it, setting out suggestions for accomplishing a reasonable amount of work within the time period stipulated by the rules, rules adopted by this House unanimously, rules which the Government takes credit for as representing the best in parliamentary reform. If the Government is serious, it will withdraw the motion to suspend the rules currently on the Order Paper and stick with its belief, if it ever had that belief, in parliamentary reform as exhibited by the current rules and show that it has the competence, ability and willingness to work within them.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I want to rise on a point of order in support of the position just taken by my hon. friend, the House Leader for the Official Opposition.

I want simply to say through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Parliamentary Secretary that on many occasions now—I can recall them over at least seven weeks—the House Leader for the Official Opposition and I have offered to co-operate on a whole set of Bills. An example of that element of co-operation that we are able to accomplish in the House occurred last week when a number of Bills of interest concerning issues relating to native people were packaged for debate. Through the co-operation of all Members we were able to move, I would say, even more than expeditiously. Quite frankly, we were prepared to set aside, after unanimous consent, a number of rules to enable these Bills to move through quickly. We accomplished that. I think that day exemplified just how productive the House can be in terms of moving legislation forward.

However, as my hon. friend has indicated, it does require a recognition that there is a role for the opposition Parties in the parliamentary system. That requires not only leadership but the willingness to co-operate by the Government, not simply the attitude that, "We are the Government. We have a large majority. We can do anything we like, including setting aside the rules of the House of Commons". That is not the case.

I simply want to remind my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, that we are here to co-operate on appropriate pieces of legislation whenever we can. We demonstrated that willingness last week. We are prepared again on a whole set of Bills to do the same thing. But we ask the Government to bring forward those packages, to negotiate those packages, so that

we can make this place work in the best interests of the people of Canada.

Mr. Nowlan: Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the last remarks of the NDP House Leader with respect to working in the interests of the Canadian public and not to get bogged down in a great many procedural problems which we know we have here no matter what the charade may be for the public.

There is a Bill called Bill C-131 which deals with amendments to the National Transportation Act and which involves the handicapped. I must say, just to test the sincerity of the Loyal Opposition and of the House Leader of the NDP, I for one, and the handicapped, are wondering why we have not been able to move that Bill out of the procedural problems of the House and into the standing committee to which it is now designated to go. I think that perhaps it could even be referred to that committee today to show some good faith to the handicapped who want to have their problems addressed by the committee. We could get that Bill out of the House, out of the procedural wrangles that will continue no matter what protestations there are. We can do something fundamental for the handicapped in order to help them.

Today, on Thursday, when we are supposed to do things for the nation and not just for each political Party, I would like the House Leaders to agree on the floor of the House to have Bill C-131 referred to the standing committee to find out if the amendments to the National Transportation Act address the problems of the handicapped. We were the ones who helped focus attention on it. That would reassure me that this place still has a purpose rather than just engaging in a political dogfight that we know we are going to have for the next several weeks.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend for making a very important point. Just so everyone, including those outside this House, understand the point, it is that the business of this House, if it involves measures introduced by the Government, is within the control of the Government. The Government has the absolute right to call at any time any measure it wants to bring before the House for debate. If the Government really cares about the kind of measure or, specifically, the measure mentioned by my hon. friend, it will have our consent, although it does not need it, to call immediately Bill C-131 rather than the motion to suspend and to throw out of the window the rules of this House.

I put the Government to the test. Let us see if it is sincere about the measure proposed by the Hon. Member from Nova Scotia. It does not have to proceed with the motion to suspend the rules. Instead, it can immediately, without notice, without my consent and without the consent of the NDP House Leader, call the measure to amend the National Transportation Act to help the handicapped.

I challenge the Government to show it cares for the people of the country and to call that measure right away and forget