

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, the government muzzles the members during the debates, imposes time allocation on them and, on top of that, reduces without reason the time to debate time allocation. In five years, this government attempted 31 times, as I mentioned earlier, to impose time allocation, Mr. Speaker, a measure which had previously been used only 29 times over 19 years. It was not used more than 29 times over 19 years and they used it 31 times over five years!

The government reduced by two hours the debate time when closure is applied. This is by virtue of the motion dealing with Standing Order 57, which puts an end to the debate. During this 34th legislature, closure was applied 8 times on very important bills, namely the bills on capital punishment, free trade, the goods and services tax, unemployment insurance. The intent, I gather, was to give the greatest number of members possible a chance to be heard. That is not what happens when closure is applied.

The government is reducing from 25 to 20 the number of sittings days allotted to the business of supply, designated as allotted days. These days are a fundamental aspect of our work. Allow me to quote a few more statistics. Out of the 1,611 hours the House sat between April 3, 1989 and December 31, 1990, only 174 hours, or 10.8 per cent of the time, were allotted to this most important task of making the government accountable for the way it spends the Canadian taxpayers' money.

• (1550)

Also, Mr. Speaker, what irritates me in these proposed changes is the fact that if the House does not sit following a decision made by the majority, and the government as we know has the majority, then the opposition will have to give up one allotted day for every week the House is not sitting. In other words, we stand to lose allotted days if the government decides to adjourn the House for more than one week.

The government wants to reduce from six to four the number of days allotted to the Budget Debate. Can you imagine! Out of the 1,611 hours of debate we have had since April 3, 1989, the Budget Debate took only 43 hours and a half, that is less than 3 per cent of the time of the House. Yet, during the Budget Debate, members can talk about what policies the government wants to take to reduce the deficit, to decrease our national debt,

to create a better climate and bring the Canadian economy back on track. Mr. Speaker, since 1989, we have barely spent 3 per cent of the 1,100 sitting hours discussing the Budget.

The only reason why the government is limiting debate is that it wants to hide its poor financial performance from the Canadian people.

An hon. member: That's right!

Mr. Gauthier: In fact, the government has not reduced the deficit which reaches \$30.5 billion in 1991. It has increased the national debt to \$380 billion, and so on. Mr. Speaker, we have got to have a serious debate on this issue.

An hon. member: Exactly!

Mr. Gauthier: One of the most important points in the changes to the Standing Orders has to do with a new parliamentary calendar. I know that I do not have much time left, but I would like to cover this point. The proposal in no way favours a member who must return to his riding every week to see his constituents and his family on the weekend. It does not encourage that, Mr. Speaker. It gives a week every three weeks, and we know that the government will wait for that week off to make its negative announcements and those they do not want to debate in the House because we will see ministers making punchy statements or issuing press releases that otherwise could be examined seriously here in the House during oral question period or in debate.

Mr. Speaker, I swear that that is what will happen. You will see. They will use that week to get their negative messages across or to announce things on which the House will not have a chance to speak.

An hon. member: That is true!

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, in my years here, I have suggested some things and I would like to conclude on that because what I have to say is positive. A while ago, I asked that any bill tabled in the House have a summary on the first page to help understand what the bill is about. Every legislature in the world that I know like those in France, England and several provinces do the same. They have the bill with a description, a brief concise explanation of what it is about. We do not have that here, eh? Many people spend their time unable to understand what it is about. If the bill were accompanied by such an explanation, we would be further ahead.