

Government Orders

• (1310)

If there is something wrong with allowing more of our 295 members to participate in a debate instead of allowing fewer people to speak longer, then I do not understand how this violates democracy.

Surely it is better to give more members an opportunity to speak more often on behalf of their constituents in this Chamber. Surely it is better to have smaller committees where the role is meaningful and where one does not sit and warm a chair but can actually participate.

Surely those two things operate in the public interest better than the system we now have.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I was in my office and watched the speech on the tube that my hon. friend from Calgary made just recently.

I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I was very disappointed in the tone that he set and the so-called factual information that he gave the House. It was coming from a person for whom I have a lot of respect. I have worked with him in a friendly and what I thought was a constructive manner over the years.

I did not hear from that member any substantive argument that Canadians would understand why this government wants to change those rules, except that he took his 20 minutes to do something which the government could have done in committee if it had those facts and those kind of statistics. I could quote all kinds of other statistics because I was there for seven years as Whip also, showing him how his members were lax in their duties in committees.

It does not accomplish much in creating the kind of atmosphere of parliamentarians' decency. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we had to plead with the government to get a committee going here on consumer and corporate affairs not very long ago, because it refused to call it. He has his reasons, and we have ours.

Parliament was paralysed in terms of committee work. The transport committee was also. A lot of things could be said that are negative of the government Whip. I must tell him sincerely that I appreciated the work he did on trying to get this so-called reform going.

I do not think he succeeded in convincing any of the members of this House or of the public that this was the right move. I think he played partisan politics all through his speech. He tried to denigrate the NDP and the Liberals, knowing very well that what he said could be termed—I cannot use the word because the book says I cannot use it.

The government is now saying that members have to go back to their homes, their ridings and meet with their constituents. If I recall yesterday, the House leader, his boss, said on page 19133 of *Hansard*:

People are demanding more contact with members of Parliament and more involvement.

I agree. In 1988 when the majority kept the minority Official Opposition of 40 members or less going all through the summer of 1988, it did not give a damn about the people in our ridings. It did not care because it was platooned.

It had 70 members away and 140 members doing something else. That is why I cannot use the word. Understandably, the government knows what I am talking about. Let us have a constructive debate. I will talk on this thing this afternoon and I will not use that kind of crap.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hawkes: Anybody watching will have trouble believing how we respect each other in this Chamber.

This is not a time in Canadian history and simply not the moment when partisanship should dominate. What should dominate at this point in our history in this Chamber is an attempt to come together to resolve problems.

When we were in opposition we used the rules to delay the government. We hoped and felt we did it judiciously. We delayed government where it should be delayed and we approved where it should be approved. We did not, I do not think, stand in the House and berate the government for going on longer because we blocked it.

It is so difficult for someone watching television to believe that we get speeches on the need for more debate and more freedom of speech and when we stand up—and I will do it again in closing—and ask for the unanimous consent of the House to continue this debate this evening beyond the normal hour of adjournment for another five, six or eight hours, from six o'clock until midnight? Would you, Mr. Speaker, simply ask the members of this Chamber whether their conviction about the importance of freedom of speech extends to