

*Summer Recess*

I think this evening it is a sad occasion when we are speaking against a time limit, when we know the ability of elected members of this House to speak will cease, and they will be silenced, not because of the fact that they want to go home but because of the fact that they are being forced to go back to their constituencies, by this government. All of us would agree that we have been here a long time. In fact some of us would welcome the opportunity to go home. I think I would include myself as one of them. However, there are many pressing matters with which Parliament could be dealing if, in fact, the government chose to deal with them.

I listened with a great deal of interest to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) when he led off the debate on this adjournment motion this afternoon. I noticed that he referred to many—

**An hon. Member:** Don't forget this. This is your last day.

**Mr. Mayer:** I have not even started to speak, and hon. members opposite are getting excited. When the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs led off this debate he used many phrases to which I would like to refer. He said that a democratically elected majority should be able to govern. I do not know why he should talk about that. That is what parliamentary democracy is all about, and a democratically elected majority should be able to govern. By implication he is saying that the opposition should not oppose, and that it should simply lay down and let the government roll over us.

Surely one of the most basic things about any democratic system is how one treats the minority once the majority has assumed power. In some countries people are beheaded, and in other countries everything possible is done to silence the opposition. Some countries do not have closure. As the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) said earlier this afternoon, closure is just as ominous to us, in terms of cutting off debate and our ability to speak in this institution, as a physical guillotine is to some other countries less fortunate than ours, as far as democratic principles are concerned.

The hon. minister also talked about the excessive abuse of parliamentary procedure. I think that was, by inference, an insult to the Chair. The Chair is here, on behalf of all hon. members, to see that rules are evenly applied. I think that it is more than a direct insult to the Chair when a minister of the Crown talks about abuse of parliamentary procedures. Anything that the opposition has done has been done in strict accordance with the rules and practices of this House. The Chair has been there to observe them, and I think that what we witnessed at eight o'clock last night bears this out.

If there was an excessive abuse of parliamentary procedure, it was attempted at eight o'clock last night by the party in power. I think that it was a grave error in the minister's judgment when he talked about that earlier on today. He further stated that in the British system, second reading of bills is really approval in principle and for those who know anything about it, second reading is given in one day. We would be more than happy to give second reading approval in one day if we could discuss bills that were simple and straight-

forward. However, in many cases what we have had are so-called omnibus bills which contain several clauses and refer to many subjects. For example, Bill C-57, which has not been passed yet, contained 123 clauses in 122 pages. I do not know how a minister can expect a bill of that size to receive second reading in one day. It defies my sense of fair play and logic. It would not be at all responsible of the opposition to allow the government to get away with passing a bill of that size in one day.

● (2010)

The Bank Act, Bill C-6, has 468 pages. It looks like a telephone book. We did not pass that in one day, of course. Members of the agricultural committee and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Ostiguy) will remember that we gave Bill C-46 second reading in one day. It was a straightforward bill so the opposition co-operated in getting it through without a lot of debate. That is what happens with straightforward bills.

If the minister wanted to be fair and not to talk nonsense, he would see that some of his criticisms of the opposition are not fair. Bill C-46 is important to cattle producers in this country and we have been trying to get this legislation for four or five years. Now, however, if the House adjourns until October 14 there is a danger that if we move into the second session of this Parliament, without Bill C-46 receiving third reading, we will lose the bill. That would mean that we would have to go through exactly the same procedure again. Yet we gave that bill second reading in one day, but it took some prodding of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) to get it on the Order Paper. For the first four months at the beginning of the year nothing was referred to the agriculture committee. We would have dearly loved to have had Bill C-46 and, had the government been interested or organized, the bill could be law by now.

The minister also said that there is contempt and erosion of the privileges of the members of the House of Commons. I think we saw that erosion take place in this precedent-setting closure motion which was pushed through by this government in order to pass the adjournment motion.

We could deal with many things if we stayed, Mr. Speaker, and one of them is interest rates. A lot of people in the country regard the subject of interest rates as a time bomb. The longer we go without considering their effect on the small businessman, on householders, on families, on people trying to make mortgage payments, the greater trouble we get into.

I should like to put on record some figures that refer to the cattle industry. The average price of a pound of beef over the counter is \$2.75 to the consumer. Of that \$2.75, approximately 70 cents is attributable to interest charges. I refer to meat for two reasons. First, it is a major component in the diet of most people and, second, it is a product with which I am familiar and for which I am able to get figures. I suspect that the situation is the same for other foods. We need to reflect on these figures, Mr. Speaker.

We have often been accused by the government of simply opposing and not making suggestions. But many suggestions