

EVENING SITTING

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTIONS

Amendments to Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly (continued)

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the Hon. Mr. Andrew.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The motion under debate, Mr. Speaker, is a motion put forth by the government member opposite, the member from Kindersley. And the motion that we are about to debate this evening, Mr. Speaker, deals with the changing of the rules of the legislature. The government wants to use its power — the power of its majority — to change the rules in this legislature in a very non-traditional manner. They want to put the . . . change the rules so that the bell-ringing rule can no longer be used in the traditional fashion it has been for years and years and years and how it has worked for years and years and years, and to limit the bell-ringing time by regulation to one hour.

More specifically, Mr. Speaker, the motion goes something like this, and I quote from the blues of this morning. And the motion proposed by the Hon. Mr. Andrew:

That the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly* be amended by adding the following after rule 33(1):

(2) When the Speaker or the chairman of Committee of the Whole, or Committee of Finance, has put the question on a motion and a recorded division (recorded division meaning the vote, Mr. Speaker) is requested under rule 33(1) (that's one of the rules of the legislature), the bells to call in the members shall be sounded for not more than one hour, provided that while the members are being called in, either the government or official opposition member serving as House Leader, Acting House Leader, chief whip or deputy whip may approach the Speaker or chairman to request that the division be deferred . . .

So the rule makes provision for an actual postponement of the vote until a later time, Mr. Speaker, in moving this particular motion. And the member acknowledges that there are times when you simply can't have everybody in to be able to conduct the vote, members being out in distant parts of our province — although that is not the motive for this particular motion. And it goes on to read that the:

. . . chief whip or deputy whip may approach the Speaker or chairman to request that the division be deferred, in which case, the Speaker or chairman shall announce that the said division has been deferred until a specified time, but in any case not later than before orders of the day on the second

sitting day thereafter.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the motion that is under debate is a government motion, sponsored by the Minister of Justice, the member from Kindersley. The member from Kindersley, the minister, by bringing that motion forward, has indicated his priority in this legislature. The government, throughout the sitting, indicates its priorities by whatever it brings forth to this House for debate. If the government decides that privatization is its priority, it'll bring forth debates on privatization. If it decides that changing the rules is its priority, then those are the things it'll bring forth. In this particular case, the government has chosen to bring forth a rule change.

The opposition does not choose the priority of debate, Mr. Speaker. The opposition, with the exception of private members' day, which is Tuesdays only, when motions of the opposition . . . One day out of five, the opposition gets the right to choose the motions under debate. So by bringing forth this motion, what the government has done is told us that their priorities do not lie with any type of Bills that might help in the financing of farms which are under foreclosure. It has chosen not to deal with any Bills dealing with day care or increasing the number of day-care spaces or adjusting or improving the day-care arrangements in the province.

It has not chosen to deal with pensions or tax reform of any sort. It has not chosen to deal with unsafe products that may be transported on our highways or our railways or not disposed of in manners that perhaps would be safer for the population. What has happened instead, Mr. Speaker, is the government has brought forth for debate this motion on rule changes, showing us exactly where its priorities are.

It's kind of interesting that when you look back over the 45 days, Mr. Speaker, of what the government's priorities have been. They have been in dealing with this particular Bill, and they also kept bringing forward the Bill on the potash privatization, and an omnibus privatization Bill. And of course we know the Bill that started the bell-ringing procedure, the Bill that the government was completely out of touch on, and that was the SaskPower Bill. Those have been the government's priorities.

To date, we could have been debating . . . Instead of debating this Bill we could have been debating our estimates; we could have been making sure that all the agencies and boards and municipalities in the province would be getting their money and getting their money on time. We could be debating the Bills that I indicated earlier, that is Bills dealing specifically with farm finance legislation or pension reform or the lotteries tax or environmental protection legislation. We could be debating those if that had been a government priority.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when we found that the government was not, was not really following or setting an agenda which was representative of the priorities of the people of Saskatchewan, as we well found out, and any member can find out when he goes . . . if you go and ask your citizenship.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member from Elphinstone, would like to make an introduction. I would just allow him to do so, with your permission, sir.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, with leave, I'd like to introduce some guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the Assembly, on behalf of my colleague from Regina North East, a group of five individuals from the Saskatchewan Abilities Council here in Regina. These people are participants of the life enrichment council, and they're with us here tonight, along with their supervisors, Lynn and Joyce, to observe the workings of the House. And I'm sure all members will want to join with me in welcoming them here and wishing them an enjoyable stay here in the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Klein: — Mr. Speaker, I too would like to welcome our guests and Lynn and Joyce, the life enrichment officers that are with them. My wife, Shirley, happens to sit on the advisory board of the Regina branch of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council and works quite regularly with the people down there, and I know that she would like me to say hello on her behalf as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTIONS

Amendments to Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly (continued)

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the motion before us and the agenda of the government, when it was quite clear that the government was really refusing to listen to the will of the people, our caucus issued a news release this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and which . . . and also wrote a letter to the government House Leader. And I would like to refer to that at this time, regarding what we felt that the government should be doing instead of following its blind political agenda, including this particular motion here on how long the bells should be ringing.

The press release stated . . . And I will quote two or three little parts from it here, Mr. Speaker. First of all, that the press release is titled "New Democrats challenge the government to get on with business." And it said:

It's time that the Devine PC Government quit wasting taxpayers' time with its own narrow, political agenda, and got on with the important issues facing the people of the province.

That was the lead sentence of the press release, Mr. Speaker, issued this morning and issued later this afternoon as we were bringing the close on the privilege

motions to . . . bringing the debate on the privilege motions to a close. Further on in the news release it says . . . We indicated on behalf of the caucus that:

We are prepared to enter into debate on budgetary estimates so the budget can be passed in the swiftest possible time, allowing those groups and agencies which depend on government financing to have the assurance that their money is in place.

This references to the budget estimates, of which only one has been covered, Mr. Speaker, and I would venture to say that through the blue book there must be at least 20 areas that need to be covered and some in considerable depth and deserving of scrutiny. And after 45 days I would have expected at least half of them would have been done by this time.

Knowing that the government has sort of lost control of the agenda because of some of the bad decisions made by their front-benchers and by the Premier, we thought perhaps they ought to have some advice as to where we were going and what more important legislation we were referring to, and we suggested they include:

. . . farm financing legislation, pension reform (and I'm quoting again), the lotteries tax, and three pieces of environmental protection legislation: the tax on unsafe products, increased fines for environmental offenses, and the protection of the ozone layer.

As well, we are prepared to deal with important matters on the Order Paper which have not been brought forward by the government. These include legislation on the gasoline tax, the Grasslands Park, child care, adoption, and the Clean Air Act . . .

That, Mr. Speaker, was the essence of the press release that was issued this afternoon so that the public would understand what it is that we're trying to do, and how we think we could assist this government in moving the agenda of the legislature, as opposed to bringing forward measures which really are not in the interests of the people of Saskatchewan. I'm referring specifically to this Bill, this motion before us which would limit bell-ringing only at the sort of whim and spiteful emotion that's been presented by the government.

In addition to the press release, Mr. Speaker, just in case the members found it difficult to get their information — of course they shouldn't get their information from us strictly by press release — we advised the hon. government House Leader, Mr. Speaker, in writing, by letter today, in a letter dated May 29, and the letter indicated things very similar to what was indicated in the news release. I'll read a couple of sentences from the letter, Mr. Speaker, into the record. The lead sentence was, I am writing you this letter . . .

It was from the opposition House Leader. The lead sentence is:

I am writing to you with respect to the orderly disposition of Government business in the

Legislature.

And then our opposition House Leader, the member from Elphinstone . . . The member from Elphinstone indicates that we ought to go on and consider Bills other than this motion which we have before us here today, including, he says, the Bills regarding clean air, adoption, family services, child care, and the grasslands park, and indicating that the official opposition would be prepared to co-operate fully with the government in order that such legislation or budgetary estimates may be addressed at an orderly and expeditious manner in the Assembly.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the letter didn't do much good, and I guess the press release didn't do much good because here we found ourselves back on an agenda of something that's completely unneeded, nothing to do with the business of the people. We're on the agenda of bell-ringing. And this is . . . I suppose you might wonder why — and I'll deal with that in a moment — why I believe that it is that we're on this particular motion.

I should indicate that this is a very . . . If they really want to do something about the rules of the legislature, and I think that there are times when you should have a look at the rules of the legislature and how it functions, and weigh it carefully . . . It's an old, established institution. Things do change slowly from day to day, and from year to year, and from decade to decade, and it certainly does need, at times . . . the consideration does need to be put to place.

(1915)

But the proper way to do it would certainly, Mr. Speaker, be to take the suggestions of the government, along with the suggestions from the opposition in their regular way, in the traditional way, to a committee at which, Mr. Speaker . . . of which Mr. Speaker would be the chairperson, of which the Clerk of the Assembly and perhaps staff of the Assembly would act as researchers. The ideas would come, would be debated in committee. The research would be done properly. It wouldn't be done . . . The legislation wouldn't be brought forward as a matter of spite or a matter of revenge. It wouldn't be done in terms of trying to teach somebody a lesson. And I think overall the operation of this legislature could be a better place if things were done that way and were continued to be done that way.

Well as I mentioned, however, it is the government's option, at the government's option that this could be done. The government instead however chooses its agenda in a different way. And they are choosing an agenda which to my mind is very politically motivated.

It's kind of a sad thing, Mr. Speaker, to see that the traditions and customs of this legislature will be changed unilaterally without the co-operation, in this case, of all of the people who are elected by the people of Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I come then to the point, if that's the way . . . I've indicated to you how I feel it should be done. And then I have to answer to myself, why is it then that the government is doing this? Why is it that they are choosing to go at it in this way? I could, I suppose, consider that the

reason that they brought this legislation in is incompetence and, goodness sakes, there's plenty of evidence that the government is incompetent. And it's been evidenced over the last month right here in this legislature.

First of all, they made the grave mistake of thinking that the people of Saskatchewan wanted them to sell SaskPower, Mr. Speaker. And that was a complete error. If they'd gone back to their constituencies and asked about it, they'd have found out for certain that that was not something that the people wanted to do. That's the first evidence of incompetence that I'm going to put forward.

And I think that perhaps what they're doing here is . . . And it's another example of incompetence; they could have used a different method. Another piece of evidence about incompetence, Mr. Speaker, is they made a mistake in the bookkeeping — numerous mistakes which were brought to the attention of the public by the legislative servant, the auditor of the province of Saskatchewan. The unprecedented number of bookkeeping irregularities and an unaccountability of the money showed once again that the government is very incompetent in its dealings.

Then they proceeded to make another mistake, a mistake of trying to advertise the power sell-off — again incompetence, just like I say they're being incompetent in bringing this particular legislation forward here right now instead of sending it to committees the way it should be done.

Now this is all a government that's doing this in a short period of about a month or four or five weeks. So instead of . . . And I'm going through this chronologically.

Then instead of accepting the report of the auditor and saying, well thanks for bringing things to our attention and we're going to try to fix something about it, they went and attacked the auditor — attacked the auditor, attacked the messenger, trying to shoot the messenger in this case. Another bit of incompetence because that got them into another pile of trouble, followed by an amendment which they put forward and had to gather all of their . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I must bring to the attention of the member, rule 316 which indicates:

. . . that a Member, while speaking, must not:

- (i) reflect upon the past acts and proceedings of the House; (which he was doing).

And rule 315(2), which elaborates:

- (2) It is irregular to reflect upon, argue against, or in any manner call in question in debate the past acts or proceedings of the House, on the obvious ground that, besides tending to revive discussion upon questions which have already been once decided, such reflections are uncourteous to the House and irregular in principle inasmuch as the Member is himself included in and bound by a vote agreed to by a majority;

I think the member gets the essence of the ruling from

that, and I ask him not to bring up the past proceedings of today's motions which have been passed.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the public record, without me stating any more about this into the record . . . But it's quite clear that what we have is a government that is steering a rudderless ship. It's been error after error after error after error, and it's been documented over and over again in the press and in *Hansard* over the last month to the extent that — and here's something that wasn't debated, Mr. Speaker — to the extent that even last Friday they couldn't even get themselves together enough to get a motion in on time, at 11 o'clock. They were late with their own motion.

It just shows a government which has just completely lost control of proceedings. And it makes me wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the government is in such a position here where it cannot manage the proceedings of the House here properly, and they have to bring in rule changes in order to adjust what they're trying to do. They can't manage the proceedings of the House. How in the world can they manage the proceedings in the business of the province of Saskatchewan? How can they do it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — It's no small wonder that we've run up an unprecedented debt, and we've got taxes like we've never had before, and at the same time we've got services going down. It's no wonder.

So, Mr. Speaker, we ask that these rules not be changed, particularly not be changed in this manner.

You know, a month or two from now, or half a year from now, things could be much different — or even two or three years, things could be much different. They may not feel quite the same sting, the same sting, quite the same way. And they might start thinking about the reason for having such a rule in place; they might start thinking about it. You see, if they go ahead and change this rule now just because they've been stung a little bit, or feel somewhat stung . . . They shouldn't really feel stung. They should feel, well thanks, opposition, for bringing us to our senses; we won't go through with this because the people of Saskatchewan don't want us to sell SaskPower.

That's what should be happening. And I think over a period of two weeks or a month or two months, if they just sort of reflect and look back, they will probably think that that's the way they should handle things and go on with those things that people want done.

You see, if you do things in a hurried, unreasonable fashion like this, like changing the bells the way they want to do it, it makes us wonder what rule they want to change next. Does that mean that all of a sudden you want to just decide that debate on certain motions should be limited to a certain time, regardless of what the elected members . . . or regardless of their importance, that they'll want to ram stuff through? Will they want to ram through debate, cutting off debate? Will they want to ram through something that will cut off access of the proceedings on television or cut off access through the media? Will they want to reduce the number of readings in the House?

What rule will they want to change?

These rules have been established over centuries, actually, Mr. Speaker, and they have been proven to work. You tell me where — in what part of the globe — democracy works better than it works in the British Empire or here in Canada. You tell me that. And that didn't come about just because some government decided on the spur of the moment, after they kind of were embarrassed, that they should change the rules. It came about instead over a lot of reasoned discussion and years and years of experience. That's how come our system works.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to what an editorial of May 11 — and this is from the *Star-Phoenix* — said about the Tories bringing in this particular Bill, bringing in this particular motion, bringing in the motion to limit the readings. And this editorial says . . . The headline is, the motive of the Tories is questionable. Well the headline just says, "Motive questionable." The lead sentence:

Saskatchewan Tories may end up shooting themselves in the foot, by trying to limit legislative bell-ringing to one hour.

Why? Well you know, and I know, that while this government is in power today, and they might be in power next week, they're not going to be in power for more than a year, perhaps a year and a half or two years, and then that's it — that's it. You're not going to see another Tory government here for another 50 years.

And you know what's going to happen? The Tories are going to be sitting on this side, this side of the House. And there may come a time when they'll regret this particular action. They'll kind of say, you know what, we limited ourselves — when not only we limited ourselves but we limited the right of the people of Saskatchewan to be heard, Mr. Speaker. We limited . . . That may happen. That could well happen.

This particular editorial from the *Star-Phoenix* of May 11 suggests in here that the government should have a cooling-down period before it goes ahead with any legislation, and it indicates and I quote:

There does not appear to be any pressing need for a rule change. Saskatchewan is no worse off because the bells jangled for a record 17 days over the SaskEnergy issue. In fact (he goes on to say) the public is probably informed (probably better informed).

Mr. Speaker, that brings to light the real reason for why the bells were rung, to make sure the public had an opportunity to be informed about this very important issue, and it also brings to the fore the second important reason for having legislation, or having a rule in place, which provides for this mechanism of bell-ringing, which provides for this mechanism.

You see, in a democracy we have a series of checks and balances. One of them is this bell-ringing mechanism. Let me just put that into a larger context. Every four or five years, by custom, our electorate goes to the polls and in its wisdom

elects a majority of government members and at the same time elects a minority of members which sit on the opposite side, the opposition side.

One of the things that has made democracy work is that you give the government members the majority so that they can carry on the business of the House and the business of the province. And you give the opposition immunity in the legislature so that they can bring forward and say those things which need to be said, and also to make sure that there is always an alternate, always an alternate voice added in this province and in this country.

Without that alternate voice, Mr. Speaker, we would not have a democracy as we know it. We would have a system of government as is known in countries that have dictatorships, or in the communist bloc countries where there is just one party; there is no opposition. So our job, our job here in the opposition is to make sure that that point of view is heard. That's one of the checks and balances.

You see, I often have told . . . When I've visited schools and been explaining this process, I tell the students we that are sitting in the opposition don't always have our way — we rarely have our way — but we can always have our say. And then the people four years from now, or five years from now, between elections can decide on whether they liked what the government members have done or they approve, and if they approve they will re-elect them. And if they disapprove, then they give the people who are sitting in the opposition, they give them the mandate to go into government. That's the way our system works.

(1930)

Now in order for the word to get out, the opposition members have some techniques and the government members have some techniques. The government members have at their disposal advertising money. They can easily put to place all kinds of advertising, they can charter the government plane, they can take any kind of trip, they can authorize any kind of people . . . They can authorize any kind of staff to go and explain what the government programs are, and in that way can get the word across and check with the general public to be sure that the public knows what the direction is that they want to go.

The opposition, on the other hand, does not have the financial means at their disposal to do the same things. The opposition simply does not have, and probably shouldn't have, the amount of money for advertising that the government has. You can't be buying ads and wasting money at the rate the government is, at any rate, and there shouldn't be.

But what do you do or what do you have instead? Well you have a couple of systems in place: one of them is debate in the legislature, which is recorded in *Hansard* and televised; and second is access to the press, and the press has a very important message, an important role here.

A third method of getting the attention of the public is to

take that very, very risky step of ringing the bells. And I say "risky" advisedly, because that bell-ringing system we have in place has built into it its own discipline. Any opposition that would dare to ring bells repeatedly, *ad infinitum*, often and without good reason, runs the risk of losing public favour — runs that risk.

In the particular case here that we were in, Mr. Speaker, the ringing of the SaskPower . . . the ringing of the bells to save SaskPower from privatization, to save it from privatization, what happened is there was a chord that was struck that the public agreed with. Sixty-seven per cent of the public agrees in Saskatchewan — or agreed at one time, according to one poll. I believe it was a Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* poll or at least it was commissioned by them.

An Hon. Member: — Angus Reid.

Mr. Kowalsky: — An Angus Reid poll, my colleague from Elphinstone tells me.

So it verified the feeling that we in the opposition were getting by talking to our constituents. It verified it. And so what we have is we have public support for that move, because that move, the concept of ringing the bells, that check and that balance on this legislature, was used in the proper manner by this particular NDP, this particular NDP opposition, Mr. Speaker, used responsibly.

It says here in this *Star-Phoenix* editorial which I quoted from earlier that:

. . . (this) stand-off also got political action — the government will delay legislative debate while a panel it appointed travels the province.

The Opposition was able to accurately measure acceptance of the bell-ringing tactic, returning to the legislature when the people felt the point had been made.

Mr. Speaker, if you . . . Or I would ask any member, if they have a chance to go and speak to any of their news directors in their area, or any editors, and ask them if this method, this method of bell-ringing, did actually achieve the objective of making sure that the public was more informed, or less informed, they will to a person, I'm certain, tell you that because of the bell-ringing there were more people that are advised of what this government is trying to do. And that's the whole procedure — that's the whole reason behind it.

And that, Mr. Speaker, is why this system of government here works. Every once in a while, when the government loses touch — I mean the government members lose touch — it is the duty of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, sitting on this side, to bring them back to reality. If that bell-ringing process was not here, I don't know if that could have been accomplished. It may have been. There may have been other ways of doing it. It may have been, but if it works why try to wreck it? If it works, why try to wreck it? Why fix it if it's working? Go on and do the government's business, as you should be doing it now, bringing on the legislation that the people of Saskatchewan brought forward. Bring forward the

Education estimates; bring forward the Social Services estimates; bring forward the Health estimates; bring forward the Environment estimates. We'll go through those.

Mr. Speaker, there is another reference that I want to make here to the way our democratic system works, so that I can just sort of tie it in to the bell-ringing and show the place for bell-ringing. And I want to do this because I don't . . . I want to bring to the government members' attention about a direction that we're going, and a direction that we should be going. And I'm going to quote from a book here that's called *The Struggle for Democracy*, which is written by Patrick Watson and Benjamin Barber. And this was from the television series which was on television over the winter, this last winter, a series of 10 programs, where they documented the evolution of democracy and showed what direction we were going. And it is my contention, Mr. Speaker, that bringing this legislation to limit bell-ringing is going in the wrong direction.

Here's what Benjamin Barber says from this book, and it's on page 271. And he talks about democracy in a world scale level, and I want to talk about how it fits in to us here. He says:

If democracy is to survive the shrinking of the world and the assaults of a hostile modernity, it will have to rediscover its multiple voices and give to citizens once again the power to speak, to decide, and to act;

So he says, once again to give the citizens the power to speak, to decide, and to act.

So if you want to, if you really believe in democracy, Mr. Speaker, if the members on the government side really believe in democracy, they should listen to what the people said about the SaskPower privatization, listen to what the population is saying during the time that the bells were ringing, and then act on it in that fashion, act on it in the fashion that the majority of the people would like them to act on, and that is drop the legislation.

He goes on, Benjamin Barber goes on to say:

. . . for in the end (he says) human freedom will be found not in caverns of private solitude but in the noisy assemblies where women and men meet daily as citizens and discover in each other's talk the consolation of a common humanity.

Well this is Benjamin Barber's . . . has been quoted in this book, Mr. Speaker, because he has been chosen by Watson as a partner, as one of the authors of the book and the author of the television series, *The Struggle for Democracy*.

There is another reference in his book that I want to bring particularly to the government members' attention, particularly to the cabinet members' attention. And it deals with which way are we taking democracy in this province. This article is particularly relevant because I believe that by limiting the bell-ringing we're actually doing a disservice to democracy as opposed to opening

up our democracy.

And this quotation is from page 256 from this book, *The Struggle for Democracy*. It says:

During our lifetime this old planet has seen the end of the world's colonial empires and, in the last few years especially, a global outburst of democracy.

He says, in the last few years especially, a global outburst of democracy. And we are seeing that, Mr. Speaker, around the globe. We're seeing a slight move towards democratization — at least I hope it is — from the Soviet bloc. And we see movement in South America. Occasionally there are glimmers of movement towards democracy.

But then he goes on to say here:

At the same time, there have been dramatic reverses for what looked like successful new democracies —

What looked like successful new democracies. So he says that while most of the world has been moving that way, there are times when it has not done so, where people have acted against what had been increasing democratization.

Now anybody that's visited another country where democracy does not exist and had a chance to talk with those people and see those people, you get to realize just how valuable democracy is.

I remember, Mr. Speaker, once having a delegation from west Africa come. They were visiting our city and we were touring them through one of our educational institutions. And in the course of our discussions they were asking about how we set this up.

So there we were in sort of a remote part of Canada, because certainly although I sometimes feel that my home town is the centre of everything, but when you put it into perspective of the entire population of Canada, there we are in Prince Albert, northern Saskatchewan, sort of the isolated area from the populated centres of the province. He says, how is it that you're able to keep your programs going here when a lot of the wealth of the country is created in other parts? And certainly the other parts are more wealthy.

And they indicated to them that through our democratic system, we'd finally achieved, we had achieved a system of equalization of payments, and how he thought how wonderful it was that we were able to do it. And he indicated to me that it was only through a democratic system and the evolution of the democracy that we were able to do that.

It brought home a point to me, Mr. Speaker, about how fragile a democracy is and how we have to continue to work to better our democracy and have to be very, very careful about what we're doing to our democratic system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — I close then, Mr. Speaker, by appealing to the government members to reconsider what their priorities ought to be in this legislature. Go back to your constituencies. Seek advice. Get off the political agenda of privatization. Saskatchewan people have had enough of it, for the time being at least — had enough of it. Let's get on with the estimates; let's get on with the Education and the Social Services and the Environment estimates; let's get on with the legislation. Let's do the business of the House the way it's supposed to be done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I spoke last week in a debate on one of the privilege motions, and I said at that time that I regretted having to spend time debating such a question. And I find myself with the same feeling tonight, regretting having to spend my time and the time of this Assembly debating this kind of a question.

I am going to try again, Mr. Speaker, as previous speakers have done, to explain to you, and through you to the members on the government side, why what they are doing, why what they are doing is clearly wrong — trying to explain that we can and should approach the question of rule changes in the normal, traditional way, and why that's a good idea; and in particular, trying to explain why we shouldn't be doing this rule change at this time, in this climate, and in this particular way.

My friend, my colleague from Prince Albert, quoted the *Star-Phoenix* editorial that talked about the motion that's before this House in terms . . . as he explained, that the government ought not to be doing it, and raising the question, what difference did it make that the bells of this legislature rang for some two weeks, or 17 days, and that the normal business of the House was held up? I mean, we all know what the business of the House was before those bells rang, and we know what the business of the House, that the government has called, has been since the bells rang.

And, Mr. Speaker, frankly, the government has not shown any desire to be governing the province. The government has not been showing any desire to be governing the province. The government, rather, has, after disposing of the throne speech motion which it has to by the rules, and after having introduced the budget and having had the budget debate, which is provided for by the rules, has returned again and again and again to the potash agenda which it has. And the only time that it's got off the potash agenda, Mr. Speaker, is when it brought this motion. Now what have these things to do with the proper governing of the province of Saskatchewan?

(1945)

As has been said before, Mr. Speaker, and I say it again because in my opinion it can't be said often enough, there are serious, severe problems facing the people of this province. Almost everywhere you look there are problems that are crying out for attention by us in this legislature and by some kind of action. The government throne speech and budget speech identified some of them, and we on this side of the House have repeatedly

indicated our willingness to join with the government in tackling these problems and producing legislation and other provisions that address these problems. But the government, as I say, has shown no desire, no desire at all, to approach those questions. So I think the *Star-Phoenix* was perfectly right when it raised the question of what difference did it make that the legislature didn't sit during those days.

Now this is not how we amend our rules, Mr. Speaker. I feel so frustrated in having to make this argument again because it has been made so often. And the people on the government side of the House — and every one of them know that what we are saying is perfectly true when we say that the rules of this House have only been amended following consideration by a committee in all of the years in which this Assembly has existed — they know that that is correct. They know that is correct. They know that what they're doing is a radical departure from how the rules have been dealt with in this House since this Assembly began to sit some 84 years ago.

They know this, and yet they persist with the resolution. And, Mr. Speaker, the sad part of that is that we are not considering rule changes in a calm dispassionate way. We're considering this particular rule change in the context of all of the emotion that surrounded the SaskEnergy issue, the emotion that was expressed in every way possible by the people of this province, and which have affected all of the people who are trying to work in this House, and has indeed affected the way in which we relate to each other and the way in which we are able to debate in this House. The temperature is simply too high, Mr. Speaker. The temperature is too high; feelings are too high; emotions are too high.

What we need, what we desperately need in this House, is a cooling-off period, a period of time in which we can regain our composure, regain our sense of balance and our sense of perspective, and stop feeling these animosities that you can sense in every corner of this House, and which I think is the governing emotion behind the motion that we are debating in this House tonight.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, if feelings were not running as high as they are, the government wouldn't be trying to ram this rule change through in such a radically different way. And what I'm saying to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of the House, is that we just have to cool this thing, we have to park it for a while. We have to park it until the day comes when we can treat it with the kind of wisdom and the kind of logic and care that our rules deserve.

See, Mr. Speaker, these are not the rules of the government; these are not the rules of the Minister of Justice; these are not the rules of the cabinet; these are not your rules, Mr. Speaker. These are the rules of the Assembly. These are my rules; these are the rules of my colleagues on this side of the House every bit as much as they are the rules of the government members.

And the government members exceed the bounds of — how do I want to put this? — exceed the bounds of propriety, exceed the bounds of appropriateness, when

they use their legislative . . . (inaudible interjection) . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order, order. I'm going to remind the members once more: unparliamentary language is not acceptable. And as a matter of fact, the hon. member from Saskatoon Fairview is talking about heat, and he is correct, to the House, and that contributes to it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: — I was making the point, Mr. Speaker, that these are not the rules of the government. These are not their rules to amend. These are my rules too. These are the rules of the opposition; these are the rules of the entire Assembly, and they ought to be changed by the Assembly, not by the government using its majority in terms of the number of seats won in order to force through rules that they find convenient to their particular agenda right now. That's wrong, the member from Kinistino knows it's wrong, and they simply ought not to be doing it.

They ought to be joining with us in referring this proposal for the change in rules, together with others which many of us agree ought to be made in this Assembly, to a committee in the time-honoured, traditional way, and have that committee consider those proposals in the fullness of time, without the kind of ill feeling and high-temperature politics that we're experiencing in this Chamber in the last few days.

So as I say, Mr. Speaker, it is simply not appropriate for the government to be using its majority in this House to force through a change in the rules. And that, Mr. Speaker, is a majority only in the sense of the number of seats won. And I agree that's the most important measure, but if you recall, the popular vote in 1986 did not result in this government achieving an overwhelming majority in that regard. Indeed not. Indeed the fact of the matter is that our party on this side of the House gained more votes than did the government party. So in that context it is particularly inappropriate for the government to be using its majority, in terms of the number of seats, to be ramming through changes to our rules.

And it is idle to make the point that in this legislature, the majority governs. It is idle to make that point because those are our rules. They are as much my rules as they are the rules of the member from Kindersley. And he owes it to me and to all of the members on this side of the House to approach this question in the time-honoured and traditional way, by setting up a committee.

And I say to him, through you, Mr. Speaker, that he knows that that's correct. He knows that this is not the appropriate way in which to be changing these rules, and even at this late date, with all of the things that have been said in this debate, it is still not too late for us to agree to take advantage of this mechanism.

Indeed, it is a form of tyranny, Mr. Speaker. And I believe that to be completely parliamentary as a term to be applied to what's happening in this House. It is a form of tyranny — the tyranny of the majority in a situation where the majority ought not to be exercised, where the fact that

the government has the number of seats that it has is being used to change rules which have always been changed by discussion and by consensus.

And there's a reason, Mr. Speaker — this argument has been made to you before, but I want to make it again because it's so important — there's a reason why changes in the rules have been approached in the manner that they have. There are good, logical, compelling reasons, most of which I've mentioned already, and we ought not to depart from that format because if we do, if we do, then those of us in this House and those people who will come to this House after elections in the future are going to have to live with this precedent, and governments in the future will not feel constrained, as they have felt prior to this, about changing the rules to reflect advantage to themselves.

The effect of this precedent will be that the rules will be regarded as the government's rules to change as they like; that the government is the master of the rules of this Assembly because it is prepared to use its parliamentary majority, no doubt with a firm whip and discipline, in order to ensure that the majority votes for the motion.

And with that precedent in existence, then who can argue that the government does not have the right to change the rules unilaterally whenever it likes, whenever it wants to? And how are we to live with that kind of a precedent, and suggest to ourselves that we have the same kind of democracy that we had before? It is a serious backward step, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think I exaggerate one bit by putting it in those terms. It is a very bad precedent. We should not be doing this.

Now the other important thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we don't have to be doing it this way. We don't have to be doing it this way. We on this side of the House made it perfectly plain to representatives of the government side of the House that we were prepared to sit down in a committee, beginning immediately, with representatives of both sides of the House to in fact discuss this precise rule change.

And we suggested other things that should be included in those discussions, and the government suggested other things which could be included in those discussions. And we very quickly found in those discussions, Mr. Speaker, that there was a substantial area of agreement as to a number of rules that could be changed. And it was clear from what was said on both sides that amendments could be made to this rule as well as to other rules. By "this rule," I mean the rule about the ringing of the bells. It was also agreed that question period could be extended.

I know these agreements were subject to caucus approval on both sides but the representatives themselves, who were important members of the two sides of the House, important members from the opposition side together with the high-ranking representatives from the government side, quickly agreed that the question period could be extended.

They quickly agreed on certain adjustments or rearrangements as to private members' day — what we would do on Tuesday. They discussed the regularizing of

the tabling of certain documents, such as public accounts and annual reports. They discussed an idea about notice of the order of government business on a weekly basis, rather than on the most informal arrangement that exists now, which is at best on a daily basis, even in fact sometimes on an hourly basis, if that — sometimes with no notice at all. But the representatives were easily able to sound each other out on the question and agree that some kind of longer period of notice, such as a weekly period of notice, would be appropriate.

And they also discussed the response to orders for return and elements of oral questions, and found good reason to believe that there could be agreement on those things as well. Now that's a substantial list of rules, Mr. Speaker. And included in those rules that could be changed was the rules respecting bell-ringing. And our representatives made that clear, and government representatives understood exactly what we were saying.

So that there was a substantial agreement between those representatives that a committee should be constituted, and that it should get to work, and that it should report at a relatively early date. No date was agreed upon, but from my understanding of what took place and my experience in negotiating various kinds of agreements, it was clear that agreement could be reached that that committee would report back to this House within a reasonable time. And therefore, it wasn't a question of parking this suggestion or sidelining it indefinitely, but was rather a question of moving it off into another forum where it could be discussed dispassionately, logically, and with an eye to the better running of the House business in a general way.

Now, why . . . That agreement, if I may call it that, Mr. Speaker, that understanding between representatives fell apart because the government caucus turned it down. Now that's well-known; that's a matter of public record. The press has reported that and I'm not telling the House anything that the House doesn't already know. But you have to ask yourself, Mr. Speaker, why in the world the government members would turn down such a proposition. Why?

(2000)

The only reason I can think of, Mr. Speaker, is that they want to engage in the exercise of a demonstration of power. They're going to take this rule change and they're going to stuff it up our nose no matter what we do. There's no way in which we can avoid that. We can signal to them and tell them in no uncertain terms that we're prepared to deal with this, and deal with a number of other things that they want to deal with too, and that we're prepared to do it within a reasonable time. And yet they say no, no, we're going to do it our own way; we're going to teach you guys a lesson. We're going to teach you guys a lesson. And here they are teaching us a lesson. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're just not going to be taught a lesson like that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: — You may be the big school-yard bully; you may think that you're the big school-yard bully and

you're going to push around the kid that's been giving you a problem. But this kid, these kids over here are just not going to be pushed around like that. These kids are going to stand up here and they're going to make the kinds of arguments that I've been trying to make tonight, and they're going to make them over and over again, and the people of Saskatchewan are going to hear them over and over again.

And the more these arguments are made, the more the people of Saskatchewan will realize that this is a government that is not interested in governing. This is a government that has been publicly humiliated because of its misadministration and its bad handling of the affairs of this House and its complete misreading of the temperament and the wishes of the people of Saskatchewan — completely out of touch, proceeding with a privatization agenda that enjoys less support than any public issue I can ever remember a government going with.

And we simply are going to keep telling it as it is, Mr. Speaker, keep saying to the members opposite and to the people of Saskatchewan what is at stake here and why these people are doing it, because, I repeat, this is absolutely unnecessary, absolutely unnecessary.

I'm still waiting for someone on the government side of the House to stand up in his or her place and explain to us why it's necessary that this motion be proceeded with in the way that it is. Why is it necessary to force its passage on the floor of this House, in light of the position that we have taken as to all-party negotiations for the changing of rules? Because I repeat, Mr. Speaker, those discussions did take place. The representatives from the opposition were the most senior people, two or three of the most senior people in our front bench, and the meeting was with at least two of the most influential government members in the government caucus.

And those discussions produced a substantial area of agreement in the areas that I mentioned. And included in those areas of agreement was the very question that is before this legislature tonight, and which if the government keeps calling it, will be before this legislature tomorrow night and the next night and the night after that, until finally, finally they understand that the weight of public opinion is simply not on their side. The public is not . . . The public has no intention of allowing this government to run over the rights of the opposition, the rights of this Assembly, in the way that they're seeking to do with this particular motion.

And in those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I know you would agree that any fair-minded person would agree that it is the obligation of the opposition to keep hammering these points home. And hammer them home we will, because the school-yard bully simply doesn't have a right to force this kind of a change on us. The school-yard bully does not win in the end, Mr. Speaker, and that's literally what we have going here, a school-yard bully . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: — . . . a school-yard bully trying to use its

strength to enforce its will, and to enforce it in a way that is just not acceptable having regards to the traditions of this place, not appropriate having regard to the traditions of this place. And it is a subject which could have been handled and should have been handled, and almost was handled in the traditional way, before some of the bad tempers and the hurt feelings and the macho pride on that side of the House got going and decided that this was going to be the way in which you would teach the opposition a lesson.

Well we're a little slow at learning lessons when people come at us like a school-yard bully — like a school-yard bully. Your approach is immature; your approach is inappropriate; your approach is antidemocratic, all the more so, because, as the member from Melfort well knows, the machinery for the resolution of these problems was obviously machinery that could be set up easily and would function smoothly and efficiently and quickly. And the member from Melfort knows that; every member in this House knows it. So we know what you're up to. We know what your game is.

Let me tell you, I don't think it's going to make you feel any better at all. I don't think it's going to make them feel any better at all, Mr. Speaker. If, after a month or two or three of debating these rules, they can manage to drive this change through, they're going to find that the sores opened by the SaskEnergy debate are still there. The sores are still going to hurt just the same way. The humiliation that they felt, as the tide of public opinion rolled in, is still going to be there. And like any school-yard bully, giving the little kid a bloody nose is not going to make them feel any better at all. They're still a school-yard bully, overlain with all of the psychological and other problems that a school-yard bully has. It is not an appropriate way to act in a school yard, and it is most certainly not an appropriate way to act in this House.

I want to say again, Mr. Speaker, that the temperature in here is too high. I feel it myself in the remarks that I've just made. You know that this is the kind of debate that ought not to . . . a rules debate that ought not to generate much heat. We should be standing in our places in this House dispassionately discussing the way in which the rules of this House affect the way in which we do business. And that kind of dispassionate discussion can't take place when I'm angry, and you're angry, and my colleagues are angry, and all of the members over there are saying things that I haven't heard them say before in my two and a half years in this House — very inappropriate things. Personal relationships that have been developed in this House have been disrupted, and Mr. Speaker, that's not the atmosphere in which this debate should be taking place. This debate ought to be taking place in an atmosphere of calmness and coolness and reason and rationality and logic and care, because what we're doing here has very little to do with what happens in this legislature or this session of this legislature. It has to do with what will happen in this House for countless generations.

Not because the rules respecting the ringing of the bells are changing, although, as the member from Prince Albert pointed out, that itself is a subject that ought to be considered. The pros and cons ought to be considered with some care. But what we're doing is going to be

affecting future generations, not because of the ringing of the bells but because of the precedent that we're setting in terms of process, and this process is wrong. I know it; with respect, Mr. Speaker, you know it; and the members opposite know it.

Now they somehow feel justified in doing it because the opposition walked out on first reading during the SaskEnergy Bill's introduction. And I can understand that they're cranky about that. The member from Yorkton is indicating that I'm right on with my analysis. And I understand how the member from Yorkton feels about that; I mean, I would too if . . . I quite likely would if I'd seen the political consequences of the public awareness about what was happening in this House.

The act of walking out of here fastened public attention on the government's privatization agenda, and when the people got a sense of the depth and the breadth of the government's agenda respecting privatization, their reaction was immediate, swift, and almost total.

I mean, you've barely held support for your privatization agenda within your own party. Within your own party, you've barely held a consensus. And across the province, of course, you're getting clobbered. So I understand why you would feel sensitive about it and why you'd be in a mood to teach us a lesson and make sure that couldn't happen again.

Well I'm afraid that that is not any kind of a convincing rationale, and I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that members opposite know it. They know that's not a rational reason for doing what they're doing. It's not a question of teaching us a lesson; it's a question of making this House work, it's a question of making this House work. And for this House to work we have to, in my submission, follow the time-honoured traditional way of dealing with our rules. We have to do a lot of other things too, Mr. Speaker, but that's one thing that we have to do, that's one thing that we have to do, and if we don't do it, then I despair for the rest of this session.

Somehow or another this government has got to get its act together and start behaving like a government. To behave like a school-yard bully is not to behave like a government. Governments don't behave like school-yard bullies, governments don't behave like school-yard bullies. Governments behave normally with wisdom, with compassion, with firmness, with understanding, with a plan, with an idea about how they're going to go about doing what they have to do during a legislative session.

Mr. Speaker, the wheels have fallen off the machine that was the Tory party in this province. The wheels have completely come off, and we're seeing a government who has just lost control of its agenda; not even lost control of its agenda so much as abandoned control of its agenda. And they've reduced itself to this kind of petty action that we see with respect to this motion that's before the House tonight; this kind of petty action where the motivation is to somehow teach the opposition a lesson, shove it up their nose, show them who's the boss around here, show them who's got the most seats in this House, and in so doing break one of the longest . . . well one of the

invariable traditions of this House, namely the way in which we deal with our rules.

Now before sitting down, I just want to sum up what I've said to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to my friends opposite, because I just have to know from all of the conversations that I've had with them over the past two or three years, that they know I'm right, that they know that the points that I'm making tonight are right on.

We haven't always agreed on some issues. My friend from Weyburn, for example, and I have an unsolvable difference of opinion with respect to the free trade agreement. But I don't think that we have any difference with respect to the points that I've been making tonight. I think he recognizes the truth of what I'm saying. I think he recognizes full well that it is a bad and a dangerous precedent for the government to be changing the rules in the manner which it is using — a very bad and very dangerous precedent.

And if it's not, in his view, I would like to hear him get up and explain to this House why it is a good idea to change that precedent, why it would be a good idea in future years and future generations for the government to have control over the rules of this House. And particularly, I'd like to hear him make that argument in light of the discussions that I say took place between representatives of the two sides with respect to the composition of a committee.

I'd like to hear him stand in his place and make that argument and make it as convincingly and persuasively as he can because I would certainly like to be convinced and persuaded that what we're not doing here is not only an absolute, utter waste of time, but a very, very dangerous and highly inappropriate way for any government to be acting.

The interesting thing is that, in my opinion, not only can this course of conduct on the part of the government not be justified, not only can't it be justified, Mr. Speaker, but it is most interesting that government members aren't even trying to justify it. The only justification that we've heard from the government side of the House that had any effort behind it, maybe the only speech at all that we've heard from the government side of the House on this motion, was the Minister of Justice on introducing the resolution.

I'm reminded that the Minister of Highways made an intervention, and I recall that, and I could not understand what point the Minister of Highways was addressing when he made his speech. I think the Minister of Highways didn't know the point that he was trying to get. But in the subsequent debate, as speaker after speaker on this side of the House has made arguments which are to the same point as mine, Mr. Speaker, as the arguments that I have made tonight, members on the other side of the House have sat mute, reading their magazines and their articles, and chatting with each other while this debate goes on and on, and not participating in it — no one over there standing up trying to justify what they're doing.

(2015)

Certainly not the member from Saltcoats who is intervening again from his seat, and who I know has very interesting thoughts on why it is that these rules should be changed in this manner, and why I am wrong when I call him and his colleagues over on that side of the House, school-yard bullies — school-yard bullies.

And no doubt later in this debate we'll see him get to his feet and explain to us that he's not a school-yard bully; he really is the soul of rationality, logic, and intelligence as he throws aside some 84 years of tradition, as far as these rules are concerned, and makes these rules of this House the government rules — the government rules. That's a precedent we can't live with and that's a precedent that you can't live with, because some day, my friend, you're going to be in the opposition. Some day you're going to be in the opposition.

The minister from Lloydminster indicates he will not be in the opposition, and I agree that he will not be in the opposition. I quite agree.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: — But the point remains that the Conservative Party in opposition cannot live with a situation where the government feels free to change the rules according to the government's own wishes. You can't live with that; we can't live with it; our children can't live with it; future generations can't live with it. The member from Thunder Creek knows I'm right. I think his silence is assent.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the point simply is that this is not the appropriate way to go. We shouldn't be doing it this way; we don't have to be doing it this way. We've indicated that in the strongest possible terms. It's still not too late. Surely it's still not too late for government members to sit down in their caucus and think this thing through again and signal to us that there is some way in which this matter can be referred to the committee in some appropriate, face-saving way, and we'll deal with these rules as we have always dealt with them: calmly, dispassionately, and in the interests of the future of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, for the second time in two weeks, it doesn't give me a great deal of pleasure to have to participate in this debate which, in many respects, changes the rules in this legislature without the agreement of the Legislative Assembly.

In our view, the government's decision to bring forward this motion to limit the opposition's ability to ring the bells, if they so choose, on controversial issues, is really a change in procedure and rules without the agreement of the opposition.

This government, in my view, Mr. Speaker, will set a dangerous precedent if it uses its majority to force through the new rule changes. Never before have the rules changed without all-party consent. A departure now . . . And I want to remind the members opposite that a departure now will permit, will permit future

governments to change the rules at will.

These members of the government need to realize that their decision to ram through this rule change, the rule change that will limit bell-ringing in the future, without opposition consent, gives us the right and the ability, when we are the future government of this province, to change the rules at will, without your consent. And I want to remind the members of that.

Now there is no denying that bell-ringing can be viewed as parliamentary obstruction; there's no denying that. But parliamentary obstruction in this country and in other Commonwealth countries has a long and respected history. Majority rule puts road blocks in front of the opposition. There's no question about that. The majority rules and has ruled in all democratic countries in the world and particularly in Commonwealth countries.

There are times, however, I'd like to remind the government, when issues are so important, so extremely important, that it requires that the opposition's objections be put forward in an exceptionally forceful way. On contentious issues, informed debate alone does not always show the opposition's concern. Sometimes obstruction, Mr. Speaker, exerts pressure on governments to reconsider their position. Sometimes obstruction does that, and it encourages the majority government to move slowly and cautiously.

If used wisely, Mr. Speaker, bell-ringing gives the opposition the ability to allow the public to get involved in the debate on controversial issues. And when the opposition made the decision to walk out on first reading of the Bills to privatize the Saskatchewan Energy Corporation, or the natural gas division of SaskPower, we made the decision knowing that we were treading, Mr. Speaker, on thin ice in terms of parliamentary tradition.

But we felt it so important that the public, the citizens of our province, the taxpayers of our province, have the opportunity if they wish to, to participate in the debate that would privatize the gas company, a company that has been publicly owned for many, many years.

Now as I said, bell-ringing gives the opportunity for the public to get involved in controversial issues, and it gives the public the ability and the right to advise the majority government of the public's opposition. And I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that thus far in this Legislative Assembly, the members of the opposition have tabled 90,000 signatures from citizens across Saskatchewan opposing the government's intentions to privatize the natural gas division of SaskPower, and there are more to come, Mr. Speaker. The bell-ringing for that two-week period gave the public the opportunity to participate; that it wasn't only the government in this province that was going to rule the roost. It wasn't only the PC government that was going to tell the people what it was going to do.

The people had the ability and the right and the opportunity to participate. They participated by signing petitions. They participated by going out to rallies held across Saskatchewan. They participated by ringing the telephones of cabinet ministers and Tory back-benchers. They participated on open line shows. They participated

through their letters to the editor. And newspapers across this province participated by writing editorials condemning the government for breaking its word that it would never privatize a utility in this province.

And this government has broken its words to the people of Saskatchewan. So the opposition party, the New Democratic Party, took the drastic step, a parliamentary obstructionist step, of ringing the bells.

Now I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that in this province we have had a history of having the right to ring the bells. It has been totally within the democratic framework, it's been totally within the rules as set out by this Legislative Assembly. The members of the opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, had the right and the ability to ring the bells and that's what they did.

Now political conviction and knowledge of procedure makes an opponent worthy of begrudging respect. And I think that because the opposition party, the New Democrats, took the step to ring the bells, because this government was breaking its word to the people of Saskatchewan not to privatize a utility, that we have won the begrudging respect of the members opposite.

I don't think that they thought that we were going to ring the bells on first reading. I think that they have to respect us for taking that step because they certainly have slowed down their decision to privatize the natural gas company.

Bell-ringing, Mr. Speaker, can also be used to gain legitimacy because of what it accomplishes. It can be successful in forcing a compromise, and it can turn divisive legislation into legislation of consensus. And I think on this occasion, all people in Saskatchewan will acknowledge that the opposition's decision to ring the bells over the privatization of SaskPower, natural gas division, has slowed this government down.

Had we not taken that step, we wouldn't be debating rule changes before this legislature, we would be debating the SaskEnergy sell-off, the decision by this government to break its word not to privatize utilities. But because the opposition rang the bells, the public got involved in the discussion over whether or not privatization should proceed in this province.

The message was extremely clear to the government, and what did they do? They compromised, Mr. Speaker; they sent the legislation to a committee — a committee with lots of problems; a committee that has some faults in terms of some of the people that are on that committee; a committee that doesn't have the mandate that I would like to see it have. But nevertheless it slowed the government down. And that has been the history of bell-ringing in this country — it has slowed the government down.

And I just want to review for those people who are listening tonight, the recent bell-ringing episodes in this country and how bell-ringing came about. Now my review of the literature tells me that the history of bell-ringing is impossible to discover, but it certainly has been used by oppositions in this country since 1982 when the Conservative government . . . or the

Conservative opposition in Ottawa decided that it was going to fight the Liberal government's omnibus energy Bill.

Now different experts tell us that the Lester Pearson government lost a budget vote in the mid-1960s and that the bells rang on that occasion for an unusually long period of time. In 1979 I understand that Joe Clark's minority government went down to defeat with an episode of bell-ringing.

One report of the 1982 Ontario bell-ringing incident describes that situation as the first time that the bells had run for longer than 24 hours in Ontario. And I understand that in 1984, before I was a member of this legislature, the opposition party rang the bells for the longest in history, I understand, in the province, for six hours. And this was to call in the members to vote on a decision on a situation where the member from Regina Centre was being sued as a result of some comments that he made in this legislature.

Now since 1982 there have been a number of bell-ringing incidents in our country. The House of Commons, on February 16, 1982, had the energy security Bill before it. Now the official opposition, led by Harvie Andre, was concerned that the Liberal government under Pierre Trudeau was bringing forward too big a Bill and they wanted the Bill to be divvied up into different parts in order to allow the opposition to discuss it in a reasonable way. It would assist in the discussion of the Bill.

And a decision was made by the Speaker that failed to touch on any of the points that Mr. Andre raised in his discussion on breaking up the Bill, and she ruled in such a manner that caused the Conservative opposition members to leave the House, to exit the House.

Now what that protest did in the end, Mr. Speaker, and I understand that that was the longest period of time in Canadian history that the bells had rung, but what that did in the end was cause the Liberal government to reconsider its position, and it broke the Bill up into eight parts. So in that sense, Mr. Speaker, the opposition was successful in getting the government of the day to do what it wished.

Now in Ontario in 1982 the Liberals protested a raise in the sales tax by refusing the traditional unanimous consent for leave to introduce the Bill. The walk-out was symbolic and it only lasted, I understand, for about three days.

On December 14, 1982, the bells in the House of Commons rang for five hours as part of a plan to delay the passage of Canagrex Bill, which would establish a Crown corporation to sell Canadian implements, farm implements.

And in 1983, the New Democrats refused to give leave to introduce a Bill that would allow changes to the Crow's Nest Pass freight rates because of the kind of outrage that was expressed in western Canada. The government, I understand, was caught by surprise and allowed the bells to ring for a good long time while they scurried to get members to win the vote.

In 1983 the bells rang again on a motion to adjourn, and that lasted, I understand, for about seven days. What happened was the Liberal government tried to introduce measures that would prevent the NDP opposition in Ottawa from introducing petitions signed by western grain farmers and prairie farmers against changes to the freight rate charges.

(2030)

Now we've got the historic example of the Manitoba opposition under the Conservatives, of ringing the bells in that province on several occasions. I understand between July 1983 and February 1984 the Conservative opposition, friends of this government opposite, rang the bells on 24 occasions. Sometimes the bells rang for as little as five minutes, but usually they rang for two hours or more. And the last bell-ringing exercise launched by the now Filmon government lasted 263 hours before the government prorogued the session.

Now what I'm trying to say here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that there are occasions in our history in this country when oppositions need the right to ring the bells. Oppositions don't take that right lightly, or they shouldn't, because they do so at their own peril — they do so at their own peril . . .

An Hon. Member: — Well what do you call 17 days?

Ms. Atkinson: — Now the minister says, the Minister of Education, the member from Weyburn, says, now what do you call that, what do you call that?

In this province, Mr. Minister of Education, your government gave its word that it would not privatize utilities. You gave that word in the 1986 election; your Premier and your Deputy Premier gave their word in January of 1988, in June of 1988. And what did they do? What did they do? They broke their word; they broke the mandate that had been given to them by the people of Saskatchewan. They promised that they would not privatize utility companies, and they broke their word.

Now the opposition members could have sat here and debated the destruction of Saskatchewan Power Corporation, because after all it's the natural gas side of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation that makes money for the people of the province. It's the natural gas side that makes money; that's the side these people would like to sell off. And it's the electrical side that loses money; this is the side they want us to keep.

Now any opposition, any opposition in this province would not be doing its job if it failed to use all of the tactics and strategies available to it in preventing this government from going against its word. And we used a tactic and strategy that is quite legitimate. It has been a tactic and strategy that opposition parties have used in the past. It should be a tactic that opposition parties can use in the future, but this government wants to put it to us.

Now what really have we here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we have is a government out of touch. People in Saskatchewan know who's in government; they see it in

every day of their lives. They know the reality of this government. This government socks it to the people of our province day in and day out. They know who's in power; they know who's in charge. But this government doesn't like it; they don't like it when the little people stand up to them and say no. They don't like that.

And the ordinary people of our province — the little people, not the big shots that are associated with that government, but the little people of this province stood up, they signed petitions, they came out and rallied, they came out to meetings, and they showed this government that they're opposed to what they're doing. They showed this government. They showed this government that they won't put up with this kind of shenanigans any longer, that they don't want this government to proceed with its privatization agenda, which really is about putting more money and more assets and more resources and more power into the hands of Conservative Party supporters.

That's what this government's all about. It rewards its friends, but it doesn't do a whole lot for the people that live on Main Street in Saskatoon where I live. Doesn't do a whole lot for those people; doesn't do a whole lot for the people that live in exhibition area, in the area that I live in. This government's not about employment opportunities and job creation for people, it's about rewarding its friends, the friends of the Conservative Party.

And the people of Saskatchewan rose up and said no to privatization. And they have the right to do that. They have the right to do that through the official opposition. We have the right to be here; we have the right to speak on this motion, and we have the right to oppose. And we have the right, if necessary, to ring bells to draw to the attention of the people of Saskatchewan, and to the government, that they've gone too far.

Now there were very few people that were opposed to what the members of the opposition were doing in terms of ringing the bells. The people that seemed to be opposed were calling our offices because they had received phone calls from department of rural affairs officials, or Urban Affairs officials, or Education officials. Those were the people that were contacting our office worried that they weren't going to get their grants. That's what they were worried about.

But at no time did the members of the opposition intend to harm the people of our province in any way. There was no time we intended to harm them. There was at no time the members of the opposition would have allowed the interim supply Bill to go unanswered for, in terms of members of the opposition being in this legislature. The members of the opposition don't want to hurt the very people that we represent.

But we certainly did want to send a message to this government, and the people of this province have sent a message to this government that privatization is not what the people of Saskatchewan want. What they want is real economic development that will mean jobs and employment opportunities; that will mean opportunities for real small business, opportunities for the youth, the young people in our province; the opportunity for young people to stay in Saskatchewan instead of having to

migrate to Alberta or Vancouver or Ontario.

And you will note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that over 14,000 people left this province last year, and we've had several thousand leave this province thus far this year. And why is that happening? It's because this government isn't in control of what's happening in Saskatchewan. Things are out of whack in this province because this government's pursuing its privatization agenda, and the people have said no, they don't want this government to proceed with that kind of agenda.

Now the government is really mean-spirited. We came back into this legislature after two weeks of being out and about Saskatchewan talking to people, going to their doors, knocking on their doors with the petition, talking about the privatization of SaskEnergy and other privatizations. And this government came back into this legislature knowing that the people of Saskatchewan had won. The people of Saskatchewan had won and put this government in its place. This government clearly should have understood that it had no mandate and has no mandate from Saskatchewan people to privatize. And they think that's a problem. They think that's a problem, and so what they planned to do, by this motion to limit bell-ringing, is put the opposition in its place.

And then what this government wants to do, at some later stage, is to bring back the Saskatchewan energy Bills, knowing that the opposition will not be able to hold the Bills up for any real length of time. That's what this government wants. This government doesn't want the opposition to be able to protect the public from unwarranted attacks by the members opposite. That's what this government doesn't want. They don't want an effective opposition.

Well this opposition has been extremely effective. I mean, here we have a government that hasn't passed a Bill in this legislative sitting, hasn't put forward one estimate because this government continues on its privatization agenda. It has unwarranted attacks on the auditors in this province. This government can't even get a Bill passed. And instead of debating tonight what really is happening in this province in terms of the family farm crisis, we're debating rule changes; that's what we're debating.

Why don't you bring forward your legislation on agriculture; why don't you bring forward your legislation on environmental protection; why don't you bring forward some legislation on child care and adoption; why don't you bring forward some legislation on how to create real jobs in this province instead of bringing forward silly rule changes? Why don't you do that — why don't you do that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And some person yelling and yipping from the back says, read your order paper.

We very well read the order paper, and every day the House Leader says, "stand" when it comes to Bill 1, "stand" when it comes to Bill 2, "stand" when it comes to Bill 3. And what do they want to get on to? They want to get on to rule changes, because this government wants to sock it to the people by limiting the opposition's ability to debate legislation in this Legislative Assembly.

You want to limit our ability to represent the citizens of Saskatchewan, and I'll tell you this: you may get away with it, but you will pay dearly, members of the government, you will pay dearly in the next election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now you want to teach us a lesson, but you will be taught a lesson come the next provincial election when the people of this province toss you out on your ears and send you back to the private sector, I can assure you of that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now this government is supposed to have a trust relationship between the people of our province. They are supposed to have a trust relationship between the public and the elected officials. But trust is the basis of any elected government's mandate, and this government has broken its trust with the people of our province, that's what this government has done.

This government can no longer, in my view, function as a government because they are totally out of sync with what the people in Saskatchewan are talking about. When I went home on the weekend, people were saying to me, gee, it's interesting down there. What are those guys doing? — and I'm quoting them. Whose pockets are they filling? Are they as corrupt as the auditor says they are? Where's the money gone? The people of the province know exactly what's going on, and they know why you won't let the auditor audit 50 per cent of the money.

And the question the people have is: where is the money? They see revenues doubling since you people came to office; they see expenditures doubling; they see their income taxes going up, and they see the services deteriorating in this province like never before. That's what the people of our province are wondering, and they're wondering why is it that this government doesn't care enough about them, the people who you people serve, to start providing good government in this province?

Instead, what are we on to? We've been into the first Bill on privatization, then you bring forward the SaskEnergy privatization Bills. You bring forward the . . . The auditor brings forward his report, and what does the Minister of Justice do? He attacks the auditor because he has to shoot the messenger. And then we're on to rule changes without the consent of the opposition. And never in the history of our province have rules changed without all-party agreement. But you people are going to sock it to the opposition, and you're going to sock it to the people in the process.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my view that in order to get this legislature back on track we have to get off of rule changes and on to the real business of the people of Saskatchewan. And the members over there say, forget it. They say, forget it. We have record unemployment amongst young people; we have record numbers of people leaving our province; we have record numbers of

bankruptcies; we have houses for sale and no one will buy them; we have record numbers of no starts in terms of new housing starts, and these people don't listen — don't listen. They're concerned about bell-ringing. They're concerned about bell-ringing. Well what about the people of Saskatchewan, and what about their hopes and dreams and future? It's time you people starting paying attention to the real needs of Saskatchewan people.

Now as I was trying to say before I was interrupted, this afternoon the House Leader, the member from Regina Elphinstone, on instructions from our caucus, sent a letter to the Deputy Premier, the member from Souris-Cannington. And the House Leader, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, put forward our position in terms of what we wanted to occur in this legislature in the next few months. And I want to read the letter into the record just in case the back-benchers and some of the cabinet ministers didn't have an opportunity to see the letter. And I quote:

(2045)

Dear Mr. Berntson: I am writing to you with respect to the orderly disposition of Government business in the Legislature.

Once the Assembly has resolved the two questions of privilege now on the Order Paper . . .

And I'm deviating from the context of the letter. This is the questions of privilege in terms of the attack on the auditor.

. . . I believe that the Government may (then) wish to turn to consideration of other Government business such as the budgetary estimates for departments, agencies, and Government Bills.

The Government may wish, for example, for the Legislature next to move on to consideration of Bills already on the Order Paper, including Bills regarding Clean Air, Adoption, Family Services, Child Care, or the Grasslands Park. Alternatively, the Government may wish to introduce and proceed with certain measures which have been announced but not yet tabled, including further environmental legislation, or pension reform, or the new Farm Finance Act.

The Official Opposition would be prepared to co-operate fully with the Government in order that such legislation, or budgetary (expenditures) may be addressed in an orderly and an expeditious manner in the (legislature).

With respect to Private Members' Business tomorrow, May 30, I am also writing to advise that the Opposition is prepared to allow a Government Member's resolution of your choice to be debated, after one opposition resolution. Yours sincerely, Dwain Lingenfelter, Opposition House Leader.

Now here is an olive branch; here is an olive branch on behalf of the opposition. We want this legislature to start functioning. We want to co-operate with the government members opposite in terms of getting on with the business

of the people of Saskatchewan.

And how were these letters met? How were these letters met by the members opposite? What kind of reaction did they express to the media? They expressed a reaction of outrage. That's what the members opposite expressed, a reaction of outrage. How dare the opposition? How dare the opposition send us this letter?

Well I just want to say to all people listening tonight, it's not the opposition that wants to be on bell-ringing motions; it was never the opposition that attacked the auditor, it was the members opposite; it wasn't the opposition that brought in the SaskEnergy privatization legislation — that went against their promise to the people of Saskatchewan — it wasn't the opposition; but the opposition had the obligation and responsibility to respond, and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — My question to the members opposite is: who's in charge over there? Who's in charge? This is a government that obviously has gone amok. This is a government that's totally out of control; it can't even control its own agenda.

It is not the members of the opposition that decide what legislation will be debated in this House. It is not the opposition that decides which spending estimates will be debated in this House and when. It is not the opposition that decides anything other than what we are going to discuss in question period and on private members days. That is what the . . . all those other things in this legislature are determined by the government.

And the member from Rosthern says, why didn't you discuss the Saskatchewan Energy Bill? All I can say to you, Mr. Member from Rosthern, is that your government, your Premier — and I know that you are a Christian — that your Premier broke his word to the people of Saskatchewan. He told an untruth, he told an untruth. He promised the people of Saskatchewan that his government would not do anything to privatize the utilities, Crown corporations. And your Premier went against his word.

And you surely, Mr. Member from Rosthern, should understand that. And you surely, Mr. Member from Rosthern, should oppose, should oppose any premier and any member of your party that breaks their word. Obviously in Saskatchewan a handshake is no longer valid; obviously in Saskatchewan your word is no longer your word. And that has been the tradition of this province and the pioneers in this province and our mothers and fathers and other people, that your word is your word. In Saskatchewan you can count on that. You have been able to count on that in the past; you can't count on it in terms of the Tory members opposite, but I can assure the citizens of Saskatchewan, when this government, the New Democratic Party, is elected, our word will be our word. I can assure you of that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Atkinson: — Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the

members opposite say it will be a change. I think that the members on this side of the House have some integrity — we have some integrity. We will fight this government's attempts to privatize and break its word to the people of Saskatchewan because they have no mandate, no mandate to sell off the utility companies in our province, no mandate to sell SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), no mandate to sell SaskPower, SaskTel, and numerous other utility companies; they have no mandate to do that — none whatsoever.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've put my remarks on the record. It seems to me that the members opposite don't understand the issue before us, and I just want to remind them again that their decision to come forward with this motion without the consensus of the members opposite, the members of the opposition, will set, and does set, a dangerous precedent in our province. It sets a dangerous precedent that the majority in this province, the members of the government, will force its will through the new rule change.

I just want to remind the members opposite that this departure from history and procedure, where we've had all-party consensus in terms of rule changes, will permit future governments — and I just want to remind them of this — it will permit future governments to change the rules at will. And I want to remind the members opposite that some day you will be the official opposition, some day soon.

And by pursuing your strident position that only you know what's best for this Assembly, and only you know what's best for the people of Saskatchewan, that you do so at your own peril, because future governments will remember this. They will remember that you forced your will of the majority on the minority, and that your departure now will lend to us the very arguments that will permit a New Democratic Party government to change the rules in the future at will.

And I want members opposite to think about that because some day you'll be sitting on the back-bench of some opposition party. And there may be a time in this province when the New Democratic Party is doing something that it shouldn't be doing, and you will want to have the right, you will want to have the right to use the parliamentary tradition of bell-ringing, and you won't be able to do that. That time is coming soon. I just want to remind the members of this fact so that they may wish to reconsider their decision to force through this motion. They may want to do what the opposition has been suggesting you do and send this to a committee on rules so that we can talk about all kinds of democratic reforms that are needed in this province.

We'd like, for instance, to have public accessibility to this building so that if the public wished to address the members of the legislature they could come before the bar and do that.

We would like to have an elected Speaker, but that's something we can't discuss. We think an elected Speaker would certainly have more respect on both sides of the House because we're all involved in electing and choosing that Speaker.

We would like to extend the sitting hours to 28 hours a week.

We'd like the government of the day to serve public notice of the order of business, because right now when we go into this legislature at 2 o'clock, some afternoons we have no idea what this government's bringing forward. We have no idea. And I think that that, in fact, is very rude behaviour on the part of the members of the government. But we think that that would be a courtesy that could be extended to the official opposition.

We think that there needs to be timely releases of *Public Accounts*, that this government should have to table *Public Accounts*, not whenever it wishes to — a year and a half, two years later — but should have to release those *Public Accounts* no later than November 1st after the March 31st time period.

We think that this government should release annual reports on time, and there have been years when annual reports haven't been released for a year and a half.

We think that there needs to be an enhanced role for private members. We think that that needs to occur.

We think that there are some roles that the committees can play that they're not playing now, if the rules were changed.

We think that there needs to be a timely response to oral and written questions. There are days when we ask questions in this legislature and the government doesn't bother to respond. There are days when we send over written questions and it takes them two and a half years to respond to those questions. We don't think that that's proper.

We think that budgets should be prepared before the middle of March. There've been years when we've been in here in June with a budget. We think a throne speech should come down at a particular time. There are all kinds of legislative reforms that could be handled by this committee. Perhaps we need to have a longer question period. There are all kinds of things that would make this forum accessible to the public through their elected members.

But this government's just going to sock it to us; they're going to ram through this rule change to limit bells without dealing with other reforms that are necessary in order to make this institution truly democratic.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've put my remarks on the record. I would urge the members opposite to reconsider their decision to force through this . . . to consider the possibility of going with parliamentary tradition in this province and sending rule changes to a committee — an all-party committee, where it could be dealt with away from the thrust and parry of debate of this particular forum, and we could bring in a report that enjoys the solid support, the consensus, of all members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I enter into this debate tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not because I want to but because this government gives me no alternative.

When we talk about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the motion before us to limit the number of hours the bells can ring in this legislature, to limit the effectiveness of the official opposition, we have no option but to stand up, each one of us, and voice our opinion on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan to this government's high-handed, arrogant, undemocratic method of running government.

I just want to cite a couple of examples while I start. Here's a quote from *The Melville Advance*. The member from Melville is talking about the bell-ringing, and he says:

Why? Because it is wrong to shut down a democracy, the democratically elected legislature. Opposition parties in the Assembly should take their cause to the people, through the media and in elections. They do not stop the democratic process for their own political purposes (he says).

For their own political purposes. And I read that, I had to sit down to think. And I said, I'm not doing this for my own political purpose; I'm doing it because the people of Saskatchewan, the feeling that we have for the people of Saskatchewan must be heard, their concerns must be heard.

And that is where a certain member is coming from because that is from where the government comes from. Everything that is done is for their own political purpose. So I had to sit back and read this, and then I understood, after viewing how this government operates, that this statement is just probably natural for some one of their members to say, because everything that comes out of their mouths is for their own political purpose.

And in another article, from the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* on May 9, the Justice minister is quoted as saying, and I quote:

Andrew said the NDP walked out before the SaskEnergy legislation was tabled in order to keep people from seeing what it really said.

And he's talking about the degeneration of the legislature. And I can also see how this member would say that, the way they took it on the chin when the people of this province responded to their attempt to ram through legislation on SaskPower, to privatize SaskPower. But what happened? He said, “. . . in order to keep people from seeing what it really said.” What happened after that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? There were a number of polls done, one by Angus Reid and Associates, and I quote:

The government's drive to privatize SaskEnergy is opposed by 67 per cent of Saskatchewan residents (67 per cent).

It says:

The poll, by Angus Reid Associates, found two out of every three respondents oppose (SaskEnergy's) plans to privatize SaskEnergy by making a public offering of shares (to the community) while . . . about one in five . . . support the idea.

One in five support it.

(2100)

And the total . . . Part of the poll also says, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I'm going to just go down the five or six points that's in the *Star-Phoenix* on May 3, 1989.

Question number one . . . And just keep in mind, this is actually the government that said we were stifling the people by not letting them see what the legislation was. But I tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people don't fool around when it comes to privatizing a public utility. They know what is right and wrong in this province, and they have said this is wrong.

Question one is:

Do you support or oppose plans to privatize SaskEnergy (or SaskPower)? Oppose, 67 per cent (as I said).

Question number two:

Do you support or oppose privatization in general?

Fifty-eight per cent oppose it — oppose privatization in general when this government is hidebound in everything they've done in the last three months to push forward their privatization.

Question number three:

Do you support or oppose privatization of (potash corporation)?

Fifty per cent opposed that.

Question number four:

Do you support or oppose the NDP tactics in the legislature?

This is referring to the bell-ringing, and this is my point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Do you support or oppose the NDP tactics in the legislature?

And 50 per cent of the people said that they agree with us.

And number five. It says:

Should there be an election on SaskEnergy?

And over 50 per cent said yes, there should be an election, because they realize how important this issue is. They realize that.

And this government is trying to muzzle those people, when it comes to the whole privatization process, with their bell-ringing motion. This is the point that we're looking at right here. Why is the government trying to stymie the whole process by limiting bell-ringing? It's because of polls like this, after the fact, when they said the people didn't know what was going on because they don't trust the judgement of the people of Saskatchewan, and we the opposition gave them the opportunity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government likes to say in their rhetoric that the New Democrats, this side of the House, were trying to stymie the democratic process. They said that we were holding the legislature up for hijack for 17 days, that we were wasting money. Well I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the present rule, the present rule in this legislature gives the opposition the opportunity to engage the people in an exercise known as participatory democracy. This is especially evident in the whole process dealing with SaskPower and the privatization.

The rules are laid out before us and we all know the rules, and when this government brought forward the legislation, they knew the rules and we knew the rules. We used those rules, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we used those rules to let the people voice their opinion. We used those rules to let the democratic process take its natural course. We used those rules because in 1982 and 1986 this government said absolutely nothing about privatizing a public utility.

So what we did in that time was, we gave the people of Saskatchewan the opportunity to voice their opinion on a topic that was not breathed a word of by this government in two previous elections. We gave them the opportunity to voice their opinion to this government.

We didn't stymie the legislature; we didn't waste money; we let the democratic process work. And it absolutely did work, because after all people do not believe in secret workings of government. They believe in open, honest, sincere government with some integrity. I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're not getting that in this government.

Not only will this motion to limit the length of time that the bells ring, not only will it muzzle the opposition, an opposition who, like I said, gave the people the opportunity to speak, but it will also muzzle the people of this province, because if we have to depend on the media, we have to depend on general elections, what opportunity do the people of this province have to speak in between elections and if the media don't pick up their cause? That is the role of the official opposition.

And I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we gave the people that opportunity, and did they ever respond! They responded by over 90,000 people signing a petition to stop the privatization of SaskPower and SaskEnergy, and more coming in every day. Over 90,000 people, when given the opportunity that was not given to them by this government.

If they wanted to give the people the opportunity to speak, they would have talked about it in the two previous

elections. They would have said, we are going to start privatizing public utilities. But no, the Premier and the Deputy Premier, both on two separate occasions said, no, we're not going to privatize utilities. And what did they do? Not long later they turn around and they began the process to privatize public utility. How good are their words from here on in, Mr. Speaker?

Now over 90,000 people voiced their opinion. And of public meetings that were held around this province, thousands and thousands of other people joined those people who signed the petitions by saying, no, we do not want to see the privatization of a public utility. Thousands more had the opportunity. After the people had spoken, then the government went around with their little road show. And they were going to say, well, you know, we're going to explain this to the people of Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. I realize the hon. member would like to dwell on that topic. It's probably a topic dear to his heart; however, that is not the topic under discussion at the time. We are discussing rule change, rule 33(1) with some additions to it, as a matter of fact, and I would like the hon. member to come back to the topic under discussion.

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I am on the topic of discussion. And I will relate . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The hon. member does not stand and challenge the Speaker's ruling. I am simply asking the hon. member to directly relate his topic, what he is discussing, to the topic under discussion. I will not allow lengthy discussions on SaskPower or whatever other topic he brings up. I'm simply reminding him again that we are discussing a rule change. And while I allow some latitude, there has to be limits.

Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept your ruling and I would just like to say this. On the motion of bell-ringing, I've just laid out before this House the fact that during that period of 17 days when we gave the people of Saskatchewan the opportunity to speak, which the government did not at any time before that give them the opportunity to voice their opinion, we gave them the opportunity by using the rule that was in place by ringing the bells.

I was just going to summarize that by saying . . . or finish that off by saying that after we did that, after we gave them the opportunity to voice their opinion while we rang the bells, the government saw fit to go ahead and try to convince them that this was a good legislation.

But my point is this. How many people showed up at those meetings?

An Hon. Member: — Oh, by the 5's.

Mr. Upshall: — By the 5's, as one of my colleagues said, by the 5's. Every meeting, time and time again, had very, very few people. And that tells me one thing, Mr. Speaker — that the people have already spoken. The government is too late with their propaganda.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — The people have spoken. They see no need to continue the whole process. So therefore the bell-ringing gave them the opportunity to speak. And now, since they have spoken, they see absolutely no need to go to the government meetings and be brainwashed by the government propaganda. Using the rules, we gave them that opportunity. And now the government is attempting to muzzle the people of Saskatchewan by limiting the length of time that the bells can ring.

This is a very important issue, Mr. Speaker. The issue of privatizing a public utility in Saskatchewan is very close and dear to the hearts of the people of this province. Because I tell you, Mr. Speaker, there is only one gas line coming into every household here. There is only one telephone line coming into every household. There is only one power line coming into every household. And the people of Saskatchewan know that because this monopoly situation is occurring; that they do not want anybody but control of the government to manage that utility. And they voiced their opinion.

And what we have here, Mr. Speaker, with this bell-ringing motion, I think, is total disrespect for this institution. It's total disrespect for democracy, and it's total disrespect for the people of Saskatchewan who have proven, when given the opportunity to speak, they responded by saying that no, the government cannot tell us one thing by saying that they're not going to privatize the utility and then go ahead and carry forward a Bill to privatize SaskPower.

Mr. Speaker, rule changes in this House are traditionally done with the consensus of both parties, a situation where we have some people from the government side along with some people from the opposition getting together and working out a process by which the rules of this Legislative Assembly can be changed with agreement from both sides. It's a bargaining, a bargaining type of situation.

And what happened? This government, first of all they said they were going to bring in the rule of bell-ringing motion to limit the number of hours. And then they said, well maybe we should do it the right way, maybe we should ask the opposition to be part of this. So that little procedure went forward, and we have members from the government side, members from the opposition, getting together and talking about some of the changes that could be made to the rules, some positive changes, a number of them that we could bring forward and help this democratic institution become a better institution. And that was okay.

But what happened just a few days ago? Ten minutes before this legislature sat at 2 o'clock a few days ago, the government changed its mind, and they said, no more; we're going to go ahead with our motion. So what they said is that we're not going to make this democratic process work. We're going to change our minds, and we're going to go ahead and change the bell-ringing for one objective. And that is because they do not want anything to stop the procedure of this Bill to pass, which means that the public utility of SaskPower will be privatized. That's their objective.

They don't want anything to stand in the way of privatizing a public utility. They're trying to ram through a Bill, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan do not want. The people of Saskatchewan said, no, they do not want to privatize this utility. The opposition let them speak. The government said, no, we're going to ram it through anyway. It doesn't matter about democracy. It doesn't matter about the process. It doesn't matter about history in this legislature, and we are going to unilaterally display our power to achieve the end that we want. It doesn't matter what the people say.

And this government, Mr. Speaker, has a history of this. And I'd just like to go through a few of the points that relate to this bell-ringing incident where this government shows its disrespect for democracy. It started with Bill 5 in 1986, where they attempted to muzzle the opposition by controlling the regulations and the rules and the procedures of this House behind closed cabinet doors, with no opportunity for debate, with no respect for democracy.

We saw the present Minister of Justice, in 1985, intimidating the law clerk. We saw the Minister of Justice lashing out at the Provincial Auditor, lashing out at the Provincial Auditor for a job that it is his duty to carry out, and the government was trying to stop him from doing that.

(2115)

We see Bill 1 of this session — privatization. Again, an all encompassing Bill that would give the cabinet power to do anything it wanted to do behind closed cabinet doors again, with no respect for the democratic process. We've seen this government change the ward system with no consultation; *Public Accounts*, where the auditor says there's no information.

And I could go through the whole auditor's report again, but just to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that all these things point toward a government who want to muzzle the people, the opposition, and the democratic process of Saskatchewan. They do not believe in democracy. They have one agenda, and that agenda is to push through their political agenda. It doesn't matter how it affects the people. It doesn't matter who it affects positively or negatively, it's just their agenda.

And this government refuses to facilitate the democratic process. It refuses to let the process work. And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that by ramming through a Bill like SaskEnergy, whether it be by limiting the number of hours the bells to ring or any other procedure that they might wish to put forward, it simply will not work because the people of Saskatchewan will not stand by, and they proved that. When given the opportunity, they will not stand idly by and let this government run over top of them, roughshod, just because they, the government, think it's the right thing for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, this whole process that we have gone through in this legislature tells me one thing: this government's agenda is pushed on only by their

ideological agenda. In Saskatchewan we have many, many issues that are important, pressing issues to this province — many issues like depopulation, like unemployment, like the number of people forced to be on welfare, like small businesses going bankrupt, like the working poor, like the devastating situation the agricultural economy is in.

And what do we have? We have gone nearly three months since March 8, when we started sitting in this legislature this session. We've gone nearly three months, and today — not to mention they haven't passed any important Bills, but today, only today, they brought down a Bill that is going to deal with the agricultural credit corporation. And at first blush, it's not much because again, again the indication is in this Bill that everything is going to be done through the regulations made by cabinet — another indication that they have no respect for the democratic process. They have no respect to give the people the opportunity to discuss what the government is doing. They simply are going to, by regulation, make the rules and change them whenever they feel it's necessary.

But the privatization agenda is first and foremost with this government. And is it working? Well I say no, it is not working, because for the most part the privatization initiative in this province has lost jobs for people, it has lost revenue for the province of Saskatchewan, and it's lost economic control. But most importantly, it has made money for a very few Tory friends, and that's the sad part of the whole situation. And that's why by muzzling the opposition, by muzzling the people of this province, this government will eventually see that that will come back to haunt them. It will come back to haunt them whenever they have the nerve to call a provincial election.

So, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up my few comments, I would just like to say this. The privatization agenda of this government, their attempt to muzzle the opposition, their attempt to get the people of this province to succumb to their type . . . to get them brainwashed into their type of single-minded, narrow ideological perspective, that of privatization, will simply not work, because the people are bigger than that. They know what's necessary; they know what the agenda should be; they know that we should have the full accountability from this government, and to date we have not seen that.

This government has had ample opportunity to bring forward legitimate legislation to deal with the real problems. They've had ample opportunity to deal with the motions in this legislature, to deal with the problems of this Assembly in a democratic fashion with both sides of the House. They have chosen not to do that.

I think the people, Mr. Speaker, will choose not to re-elect this government, and that's why I will be opposing this motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I waited for a moment, assuming perhaps that members opposite would want to rise and defend this action. They appear not to. Members opposite appear to be uninterested in defending what they've done. They appear to be

uninterested in discussing these issues. This appears, Mr. Speaker, to be a cranky, tired government that is tired of the democratic process and just wants to ram things through.

I think it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that I don't think I've seen a government which is so impatient, so arrogant, out of touch, so absolute in its refusal to consider other points of view. It's a government, Mr. Speaker, which has become tied to a certain ideology, and they've proceeded towards that in a blinding fashion, like lemmings heading for the cliffs.

Mr. Speaker, this matter arose in this instance out of the attempt to privatize SaskPower, a portion of SaskPower. Members opposite take great offence at that comment. They like to pretend that they were not were not privatizing part of SaskPower, but SaskEnergy. SaskEnergy is of course nothing but a section of SaskPower.

They chose once again to ignore a fairly clear expression of public opinion opposed to it. To some extent the privatization of SaskPower was irreversible; to some extent the damage was irreversible. It was in that sort of a context that the bells rang for some 17 days, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the government would like to pretend that that was an abuse of the process, that we were on strike. I may say, Mr. Speaker, for a group that were on strike we enjoyed remarkable degree of public support, and those opposite enjoyed very little public support.

People did not of course feel strongly about . . . did not feel that bell-ringing was a good tactic or a bad tactic. They simply felt that privatizing SPC (Saskatchewan Power Corporation) was the wrong thing to be doing, would be injurious to this province's economic health. Like us, Mr. Speaker, they have little faith in this government's willingness to listen, to consider other points of view. And they assumed, as we did, that if the normal legislative process took its course, the Bill would pass. That Bill would pass notwithstanding public opposition; notwithstanding the polls; notwithstanding, I might add, Mr. Speaker, a clear undertaking by the members opposite when they were campaigning for election that this would never happen.

It would be difficult, Mr. Speaker, to think of a government . . . It would be difficult to think of as clear an example of a government abusing public trust. During the last election the government said, we won't privatize it. They said, trust us — wouldn't consider it. What happens? They do it anyway.

The public had come to understand, with respect to members opposite, that these are not people of honour, these are not people who keep their word, and certainly not people who are amenable to reason.

And I think that's why, when we did ring the bells, we enjoyed such overwhelming public support, because I think the public felt as we felt, that this was the only way to deal with people such as members opposite, who really have no respect for the ordinary rules of fair play — no respect at all for the ordinary rules of fair play.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment about this Assembly, and I don't wish to be misunderstood when I say this. In some degree it reflects the comments made by the member from Saskatoon, whose name escapes me . . . whose riding escapes me at the moment. The name doesn't escape me, but I can't use it. When he spoke a moment ago, he stated that the temperature was too high.

An Hon. Member: — Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Shillington: — Saskatoon Fairview, thank you. When the member from Saskatoon Fairview spoke, he said the temperature was too high. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, this is as unproductive an atmosphere as I think I've ever served in in the entire 13 years. I don't think I've ever seen a legislature or an atmosphere as unproductive.

It goes to illustrate, Mr. Speaker, that this place operates by consent, by trust, by agreement, or it does not operate at all. This is not an institution in which the government is in a position to be autocratic, unless they enjoy a very broad degree of public support. And if they proceed in an autocratic fashion, they generally lose that broad public support.

The legislature is an institution whose function is to ensure that public opinion is brought to bear on the issues of the day. That's what its function is. One of the things that the whole bell-ringing incident reminded me, and the whole incident with respect to SPC reminded me, was that it still serves that function.

The public were adamantly opposed to the privatization of SPC; didn't believe a word of the drivel being spouted by the Premier or the member from Souris-Cannington; didn't trust them to listen to reason; and thus, by an absolutely overwhelming figure, supported this caucus with respect to the bell-ringing incident.

Mr. Speaker, I said this is an institution which . . . and this institution ultimately ensured public opinion prevailed. Ultimately it was the legislature of Saskatchewan, and only the legislature of Saskatchewan, which ensured that on a fundamental issue, such as the privatization of this province's largest utility, ultimately it was this institution which ensured that public opinion prevailed, and it wasn't done.

Had it not been for this institution, had it not been for the rules and for the bell-ringing, it would have almost certainly become law.

The bell-ringing, Mr. Speaker, served a number of functions. It gave us an opportunity to get out of Regina. And one isn't a member very long before one realizes the limits of communications in this province. So many members have the experience of spending a week here, in what is thought to be vigorous, spirited debate, then they go home to their ridings and go to church on Sunday, and the most commonly asked question is: are you people still in session? This, after we think that we have given vigorous debate and given a full, fair, and very aggressive treatment to the issues of the day. The most commonly asked question is: are you people still in session?

(2130)

What it illustrates is that the means by which we communicate our message in the legislature, to the public, is very, very poor. Most people, a great many people, are not aware that the session is on, much less what's being said in here.

The bell-ringing thus, Mr. Speaker, gave us the opportunity to take the message directly to the people. The dramatic and unusual nature of ringing the bells served to dramatize our concern.

I think as well, Mr. Speaker, it caused people to think about it, to decide whether or not they liked the idea — very, very quickly made up their minds they didn't. They supported us fully. We had rallies of 500 to 1,000 people on very, very little notice. The meetings were called for two days hence, and people just came out naturally. Without such overwhelming public support, we never could have maintained the bell-ringing for 17 days, and that ought to give members opposite some pause for thought. That ought to give them some pause for thought. If members opposite think that you can make the argument that we abused that rule, and if you think that you can sell that to the public, then you ought to think about what happened over the few days we were in . . . the 17 days we were gone. We began with broad public support. Within a few days, that turned into overwhelming public support, and it remained firmly there.

The government opposite, members opposite, made a great deal of noise about hijacking the legislature. None of that, Mr. Speaker, cut much ice with the public. None of that bought members opposite any degree of relief from the intensity of the public disapproval which they faced . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Why didn't that one . . . well the member from Regina Wascana is intent on making his usual contribution from his seat where it isn't heard.

And I may say, with respect to the member from Regina Wascana, he's very fortunate that that is where he makes his contribution. If he ever actually got to his feet and made some those comments in public, your chances of re-election would be even dimmer than what they are, if that's possible — if that's possible.

Well indeed, the member from Regina Qu'Appelle is back again. Welcome back to the legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think I've . . . I do not recall a period of time in which public opinion was as intensely focused on what the 64 people here were doing, as they were during that 17 days. I really . . . I was not, of course, a member of this Assembly during the medicare crisis, so I cannot speak from that point of view. It was probably as intense and certainly, I think, took place over a longer period of time. But there have been very few instances in Saskatchewan when public opinion was focused as intensely on this Assembly as it was during that period. And people thus had every opportunity to consider whether they liked the tactic or not. They never wavered in the support of it.

Members opposite claim to do their own polls, but very wisely didn't show them to anyone; didn't show them to anyone because I suspect that they illustrated precisely the same point. In spite of being subjected to the intensity that they were, the public opinion didn't change their mind.

There are occasions, Mr. Speaker, when some of the antics of members here escape public attention, and that's well for the members for whom it happens. A good deal of what we see is not done, and sometimes that's merciful. This wasn't one of those occasions when what happened occurred without the public being aware of it. There was an intense interest in this.

I myself, Mr. Speaker, spent some time during the period of the bell-ringing, put that time to use doing a number of things, but spent a good deal of time picking up names for the petitions which we ultimately filed here when we came back. It was a most interesting experience.

A number of people who I don't think ever have voted for us, I don't believe ever will, signed the petition, and as they left, said, keep those bells ringing. The public disapproval of what the government was doing was intense, it was very widespread, cut across public lines. The public out there were of the view that these people couldn't be reasoned with and there was just one way to stop them.

Mr. Speaker, I said that this place operates on a basis of consent and trust and agreement. This session illustrates what happens when that disappears. When a government decides it doesn't want to seek consent of the opposition, when it wants to ram things, when it believes that it governs by something approaching the divine right — and the pun was intended — then, Mr. Speaker, we see what happens in this session. It grinds to an absolute halt.

This has always been a place which has operated by consent and agreement. Government House leaders meet with opposition House leaders to discuss the day's business. Each side knows that it's in the best interests of all concerned to be co-operative. Both sides, under normal circumstances, recognize that if they aren't co-operative, they lose; that if they're obstreperous, ultimately they will be the loser. They may gain something in a single day, but over the long run all sides have usually understood that this place operates on a basis of a consensus and agreement and co-operation.

An Hon. Member: — That's the way it was in the good old days, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Shillington: — It's not only the way it was in the good old days; it's the way it has operated, to some degree at least, up until this session.

An Hon. Member: — Starting in 1215.

Mr. Shillington: — Well I'm not going back to 1215, but I do think it's worthwhile to consider how this place operates because this motion and the fashion in which you're bringing it forward illustrates, as nothing can, why you people have simply almost ceased to govern — almost ceased to govern.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — You almost ceased the government. You've done it because you believe that you don't have to consult; you believe that you can ignore public opinion; you believe that you can perceive to do what you want, when you want. It matters not what the opposition say; it matters not what we want to do; it matters not what our priorities do. All that matters to members opposite is their agenda, their timetable.

This session illustrates what happens when one government, when one side decides it's going to ram it. It doesn't produce results, rather it produces a stalemate.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is typical of how this government has proceeded with this session, and why we are here on day 40-something

An Hon. Member: — Forty-five.

Mr. Shillington: — Day 45 indeed, why we are here on day 45 with the . . . No that's not accurate. If you include . . . Members opposite are assisting me with arithmetic here. Are saying that if we . . . Are typically wrong. Indeed I think they've been getting assistance from the Minister of Finance in this arithmetic.

This session has sat for 45 days, and the 17 days which were interspersed between the beginning of the bell-ringing and the end count as one day. So if you count those 17 days, we have been here . . . I suppose that would actually be 11 days, we've actually been here 58 days if you counted those 11 days.

An Hon. Member: — Fifty-six.

Mr. Shillington: — Fifty-six, someone says.

So we have been here 45 days. What have we accomplished? Well, Mr. Speaker, we had the Lieutenant Governor in about a week ago; she gave consent to one Bill. I would stake money that I couldn't afford to lose that the Lieutenant Governor has never come on the 45th day to give assent to one Bill — never happened before.

Members opposite should ask themselves how this impasse came into being. This impasse came into being because you people decided you didn't need to work with the opposition, you didn't need to consult, you didn't need to worry about public opinion, you'd do what was right, and that was just simply the end of your thought process. If the public caught up, if we agreed to it, fine; if we didn't, you'd proceed. If the public agreed with you, fine; but if it didn't, you were going to proceed anyway.

And so you did. And so we have . . . this legislature has been brought to an almost complete standstill. And, Mr. Speaker, it's a fair assumption that we aren't going to get this legislature moving and dealing with the public's business until this government gets away from this mindset that what it wants, it wants, and must have right away.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Until this government abandons this kind of an approach, which is illustrated by this Bill, by Bill 1, by the Bill with respect to potash, by the Bill with respect to SPC — until it gets away from this mindset that what it wants, it wants now, and doesn't want any opposition and doesn't want any argument, then this legislature, I think, is going to remain thoroughly mired.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, one would have expected that the House Leader, who was elected at the same time I was in 1975, who is now one of the veterans of this Assembly — I think only one or two people have served longer than he has, and only one of them, I think, continuously, for a continuous period — one would have thought that the member from Souris-Cannington would have understood that.

One would have thought that in 13 years you would have come to understand how this place operates. This is not a debating forum. It is not an opportunity for the government to explain, as if he were dealing with so many patient children, what you were going to do and when you're going to do it. It is a place which operates by consensus, by agreement, and by co-operation. Destroy that and you destroy the workings of a legislature of parliament.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with some of the past bell-ringing incidents. And, Mr. Speaker, just before I leave this government's attitude, I may say there's no evidence whatsoever that this attitude . . . that this government has learned this or is shedding itself of this attitude. This whole motion would appear to be unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Regina Elphinstone, who is the opposition House Leader, sent a letter today to the Government House Leader, which was conciliatory in tone and conciliatory in substance. The letter outlined that we were prepared to deal with government business. We were prepared to deal with estimates. We were prepared to deal with Education estimates, Agriculture estimates. Indeed I think members of this side look forward to dealing with those estimates.

I for my part, Mr. Speaker, have some questions that I am dying to ask the Minister of Finance about his budget and the fashion in which he arrived at some of those revenue figures. I expect his expenditures are underestimated, his revenues are overestimated; moreover his revenues come from sources which cannot be sustained. I therefore want to question him about that, and I want to question him about his comment that he expects to balance the budget. I don't think he expects for a moment that that is really possible except in the most cosmetic of senses.

Therefore we ought to adopt a different approach in this Assembly. We ought to stop ramming things like bell-ringing, and we ought to get back to the way this place has and should operate, which is by co-operation and consensus.

(2145)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — As I say, that is what my seat mate and colleague, the member from Regina Elphinstone, proposed in a letter which was courteous, diplomatic, and intended to be constructive in approach. That is what he proposed. What happened? Members opposite, and the government opposite, behaving as they have since this session began, ignored it — said, no, it's our way or no way, and away they go.

Well I can say to members opposite that when this place gets back to functioning as every parliament does and as every legislature does, when it gets back to functioning so that we work out our agenda . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'm really very sorry that I'm boring the member from Weyburn with a discussion of what's wrong. I see the member from Weyburn yawning at a decibel rate which would deafen anyone within a country mile.

An Hon. Member: — Like the new Co-op upgrader looks . . .

Mr. Shillington: — That's right, it makes the new Co-op upgrader look quiet. I want to say to the member opposite, I'm sorry that I'm boring you. I'm sorry I'm boring you with a discussion of what's wrong with this session, and how we could get this session working. Because until members opposite take some cognizance of what the problem is, we're going to continue to be mired in what is a very unproductive session.

Mr. Speaker, this session is absolutely without precedent — absolutely without precedent. I see some members opposite agreeing on that point. I only ask of members opposite that you ask yourselves why, why you have almost lost your ability to govern? You've done it because of your arrogance. The member from Melfort starts to point at me. Mr. Member, you're pointing at 180 degrees in the wrong direction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — It's not them, it's you. It's you, Mr. Minister, who have completely forgotten how a legislature operates. It doesn't operate in this fashion, it has never operated in this fashion, and it never will.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the question of bell-ringing, it's worthwhile to review some of the bell-ringing incidents which have taken place in the past. It's worthwhile to consider, Mr. Speaker, whether or not this has been the subject of abuse in the past. I suggest to members opposite that by and large it has not been abused.

Members in here are all aware that ultimately we are judged in the court of public opinion. Ultimately, if we abuse the rules, we will suffer the consequences. I think members opposite were conscious of that when they were in opposition, and I think we've been conscious of

it.

Mr. Speaker, if my understanding is correct, bell-ringing began, was given birth, was thought of actually by Erik Nielsen, former member from Yukon, who was then opposition leader in the House of Commons for the Progressive Conservative Party.

The Liberal government brought in a Bill on energy, which was a real monster, Mr. Speaker. The Bill was a very large Bill and had mixed up in one Bill several subjects: energy, criminal law, statute amendment, and several others. It was a monster. The opposition — and it was indicative of the mind set of the Liberals of the day, they were shortly to be defeated, but they felt they didn't have to work with the opposition. They'd give the opposition this unmanageable mess of a statute called the energy Bill, but which, as I say, included four different subjects, four unrelated subjects. The opposition objected to that. They rang the bells for 11 days. They had fairly broad public support, as I recall that. As I recall it, the public understood that the Bill was very difficult to deal with. The public understood that the government was arrogant — Liberal government was arrogant and insensitive and out of touch. Public opinion was largely behind the Conservatives, and eventually the Liberal government, to its credit — the Trudeau government, to its credit, relented.

Mr. Speaker, members opposite might then cast their minds back to that incident and ask themselves what happened to the two parties. Well within less than 24 months they changed places.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Pierre Trudeau became Leader of the Opposition for the first time in his 20-year career in the House of Commons, and Joe Clark went on to become Prime Minister.

An Hon. Member: — Joe who?

Mr. Shillington: — The member from High River.

Mr. Speaker, it has been used often, for a half an hour or an hour, sometimes for a couple of hours, sometimes over the supper hour when an opposition feels itself has been dealt with in a fashion which isn't fair. I don't think members opposite are complaining about those sorts of one- or two-hour incidents.

The next place it was used was in Manitoba. This time again by a Conservative opposition; this time against an NDP government. Brought in legislation which I personally supported at the time, do now, but which was very, very unpopular in Manitoba, very unpopular in Manitoba. It was legislation which would have created, to some limited extent, a bilingual province in Manitoba, which the government said, we have no choice but to do constitutionally, but the public didn't want it.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, it's fair to say of the Conservative opposition in Manitoba, whether you agree with them on the substantive issue or not — and I think, by and large, I do not — it's fair to say they enjoyed

overwhelming public support. But if I would have lived in Manitoba at the time he described to me the depth of the anger that Manitobans felt at that legislation, whatever the constitutional necessity of it, I think the Pawley government would have been better off to have stepped back and said, this needs another look. It needs to be better explained, but we should not be proceeding with it.

Somewhere, Mr. Speaker, about 19 . . . Once again, I think it's fair to say that that really was not an abuse in the sense that the public gave the Conservative opposition in Manitoba overwhelming public support.

That's another point I would make, Mr. Speaker, to members opposite. I don't think the bells have ever been rung for longer than a few hours without overwhelming public support. Just goes to show that there are some weapons that should be used only sparingly, and which are used only sparingly, but served as a useful check and balance when a government becomes arrogant and overbearing.

It was used in the Saskatchewan legislature, Mr. Speaker — in 1984, someone prompts me — in an incident in which once again there was a fair degree of evidence that the government was abusing their position. I remember this with some clarity because I was in the centre of this one.

I had made some comments in the Legislature about a company called Silver Developments. He sued me. When he did so . . . If you ever want to get your wife's attention, Mr. Speaker, go home and tell her, as I did, we're getting sued. And when she says how much, I said, 2 million bucks. I tell you the preparation — that was on a Friday night — the preparations for supper ground to a very prompt halt. She didn't ask how we're going to pay it, cheque or cash. She keeps the cheque book in our family and knew that the chequing account was a little light for a cheque of that size.

Eventually your predecessor in office found a *prima facie* case of privilege, found my rights as a legislator, parliamentarian, had been abused. Then the member from Lumsden proceeded to throw . . . it would be generous to him to say that he threw gasoline on a burning fire; I think he threw nitro-glycerine on a burning fire. He then moved the motion which I think upset everyone. He moved the motion which in fact rode roughshod over the Speaker's view that there was a *prima facie* case. That, Mr. Speaker, produced a walkout that lasted for four days. Once again we enjoyed overwhelming public support, and once again the government backed off.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — That, it seems, Mr. Speaker, however, was a younger government, a government with a little more flexibility.

For whatever reason, in the face of overwhelming public opposition, which I know members opposite were sensitive to, I know members opposite were sensitive to — I heard reports of members opposite, during that 17 day period, leaving church 10 minutes early so that they

wouldn't have to face people outside afterwards. If the members of the cabinet were insensitive to public opinion, back-benchers . . .

An Hon. Member: — Name them.

Mr. Shillington: — I will if you like; I will if you like. I will if . . . I would have said the member . . . I will spare the member from Melville that comment. If the member from Melville thinks I am referring to him, I have no evidence that he's ever gone to church. I have no evidence at all that he's ever gone to church. I have no evidence that you've ever darkened a church door, so I wasn't referring to the member from Melville.

Mr. Speaker, the hour is drawing late. I have not really begun yet my comments. I therefore, Mr. Speaker, ask leave to adjourn the debate in order that my thoughts could be fully developed on a lengthier day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

MOTIONS

Referral of Estimates and Supplementary Estimates to Standing Committee on Estimates

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, before adjournment I would seek leave of the Assembly to deal with a matter of a rather housekeeping nature. It is a matter that the members of the opposition have been notified of by the Acting Clerk, and it's a motion respecting the *Estimates* and *Supplementary Estimates* being withdrawn from the Committee of Finance and referred to the Standing Committee on Estimates. I seek leave of the Assembly for that, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by my seat mate, the member for Melville, by leave of the Assembly:

That the *Estimates* and the *Supplementary Estimates* for the Legislative Assembly, being subvotes 1 to 3, 5 to 7, 17, 20 to 23, and 26, of vote 21 be withdrawn from the Committee of Finance, and referred to the Standing Committee on Estimates.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of the *Special Report of the Provincial Auditor* to Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Mr. Speaker, I would also seek leave from the Assembly that the *Special Report of the Provincial Auditor* be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, in light of the developments here today in having dealt with the two issues this afternoon at hand. So I'd seek leave of the Assembly to move that special report of the auditor to the Public Accounts Committee.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Hodgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded again by my seat mate, the member for Melville:

That the *Special Report of the Provincial Auditor*, tabled on May 23, 1989, be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to have a close look at that motion. We may want to amend it in order to expand what can be done with the issue. I therefore would beg leave to adjourn the debate for the time being.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 10 p.m.