

Western Economic Diversification Act

was appropriate to stop Parliament from functioning. Day after day after day, the bells rang. Parliament was muzzled. The heavy jackboots of the Conservative Party had been brought down on the necks of parliamentarians. There was no opportunity to debate, there was no opportunity to ask questions.

I know that this is a touchy issue for some Conservative Members, and I recognize that most Members here were not there at that time, but that is the kind of Government we are now beginning to see take form. After five hours of debate on third reading of the Western Diversification Bill, Members are saying that this is excessive, that Members of Parliament should not debate this for more than a few minutes.

There are 282 Members of Parliament here. Not all Members of Parliament will speak on a piece of legislation, but there are four or five Members from the New Democratic Party, four or five Members from the Liberal Party and four or five Members from the Conservative Party who want to express their views. However, the Government is saying that it will muzzle those Members. It does not want to hear the views of those who represent the people of Canada.

• (1230)

I just want to say that every time the Government attempts to muzzle Parliament, to choke off the voice of the people, we are going to remind people of what is going on. That is what is going on now. The Government is trying to bring to a premature end the thoughtful, positive debate on the Western Diversification Fund. I want to say very clearly that we support the Bill. We are going to vote in favour of it. We will probably vote unanimously in favour of the initiative because we think at least the principle is a good one. However, we have many concerns which have been raised by my hon. colleagues such as whether the best way to spend taxpayers' money through this fund is by giving \$9.5 million to one of the largest pulp and paper consortiums in the world. Would it not go ahead without that money? Other smaller businesses are being denied funds. Those are the questions we want to pose at the close of this debate.

Again, I want to remind the people of Canada that we have seen some dictatorial tactics and antics by the Conservative Party in the past and we are seeing them again. They have a complete disregard for what democracy is. They have a complete disregard for the traditions of Parliament. We will always oppose dictatorial practices by the Conservative Government whenever and wherever they take place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Grisé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond briefly to what was said by the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis), and especially his comments on democracy. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we did. We moved to extend the debate for another hour so that more Members would be able to speak to the Bill, and then the spokesman for the New Democratic Party rose, together with the Liberal Whip, to vote

against the motion. They rose to object to an extension of this debate that would allow Members to speak to this important Bill. And then they have the nerve to accuse the Progressive Conservative Government of violating the principles of our democratic system in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I heard another Member of the New Democratic Party . . .

An Hon. Member: The socialists!

Mr. Grisé: . . . the socialists, of course. The Hon. Member said that as usual, the federal Government was questioning the capability of public servants to manage a department if they did not happen to be on the Hill or in the Ottawa region. I think it is unconscionable that anyone should make that kind of judgment regarding the federal Public Service.

[*English*]

I want to respond to the Hon. Member when he tells people sitting in front of their television sets that he is talking about what is important, that is democracy. I tell him and all the NDP Members that what is important for the people of Canada, particularly the people of western Canada sitting in front of their TV sets right now, is that this Government approved the Bill as soon as possible so the Minister responsible can apply the new policies and help western farmers and the western business community. That is what is important and that is what democracy is all about.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member talks about democracy. I want to remind him once again that I have been in this House almost 20 years and this is one of the more important debates we have had. It seems to me very strange that the Conservative Party is complaining about this debate going on too long when it has lasted about five and a half or six hours. That is absolutely incredible for a debate about a major economic initiative affecting an important region like western Canada. I have seen many debates over many issues much smaller and much less relevant than this go on for days in the House of Commons without complaint by the Conservative Party. Why would they complain about five or six hours debating western issues? The west is very important to this country.

Another point I want to make is that the Parliamentary Secretary was waxing eloquent about an extra three or four hours of debate. If he is so concerned about that, why did the Government take months and months to introduce the Bill? The agency was announced in August of 1987 and here we are now nine months later only just at third reading. Why did the Bill not come forward back in September for second reading, then into committee hearings, and third reading before Christmas? I do not know why the Hon. Member is complaining because we want to spend a few extra hours debating very important western initiatives.