

Government Orders

our preambles. I said that we may from time to time take a shot which might cast a bit of an aspersion on the government in general. I was trying to suggest that the reason I believe we tend to do that is because so often when we ask a straight question we do not get a straight answer. Does the hon. member not think that if we the government tended to give a a straight answer when we ask these questions that could possibly be the rebirth of some kind of basic trust in this place?

This process has to have an initiative on the government side first. In other words you are the people with the power. Your front bench, your cabinet really controls the agenda of this country, this House, committees, et cetera. Very few people realize that with respect to the backbenches of the government. I realize it is tough for a backbencher in the government to have input into the power structure of a government.

Would the hon. member not think it would be good advice for the backbenches of the government side to give some kind of counsel or advice to the cabinet of Canada to be a little bit more focused and a little bit more straight when it is being asked questions in this House.

Mr. James: Mr. Speaker, I hear where the member is coming from, rather than saying what might be done or what might not be done. Canadians do not want us just to talk about it; they actually want to see it.

What we could suggest is that when the hon. member next has the opportunity to ask a question of the Minister of Labour or his parliamentary secretary and if I am here to take it, he could put the question without a lengthy preamble and with no innuendo and I would him a straight, factual, concise answer. We could demonstrate to the rest of the House how to do this.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks I would like to have unanimous consent of the House to divide my time into two 10-minute periods.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Walker: That reflects the spirit of co-operation that we are all showing in this debate. Perhaps it is an indication of how the members participating in this debate feel about the way this House has been run. If I could just speak from my recent experience of becoming a member of the House, having come in with the class of 1988. My expectations of the House have not lived up to the reality. I spent years before I arrived in the House teaching at the University of Winnipeg subjects such as Parliament and constitutions and interest groups. Now I am living the reality of what I have been teaching.

One of the concerns political scientists have when they write their text books and teach students is that the reality of an institution must match its symbolism. When things get out of sync and the symbolism of an institution does not match what is really happening then people begin to lose trust in that institution.

For example, if you go back in history the monarch began to lose power because the advisors wanted to rule things themselves. Then people said if it is the advisors let us elect them and Parliament evolved and so forth.

Right now we have a situation where Canadians do not really believe that Parliament makes them powerful. They believe that Parliament in fact is destroying their country and that when they turn on the TV it reflects this. Our behaviour reflects the destruction of an institution that is valued and not the creation of a dream that is important to them.

There is not one of us who has not at some time taken a cheap shot at someone else standing up in the House, whether it is heard or not heard. There has not been one of us who has not been frustrated by a minister's answer. There is not a minister who has not stood up and said: "I cannot believe the question you are asking".

I think we all have to realize that is the way this House has performed. Partly it is the responsibility of TV because TV brought the reality that this House is different from the way they imagined to the people of Canada.

In the old days when they sent people like my predecessor, Stanley Knowles—the long time member of the House of Commons who sits at the table every day—off by train there were certain expectations they imagined him to perform. The media reported those