

*Dollar Items*

give the time because its legislative program is so far in arrears that it would never catch up.

Anyone who looks at the legislative programs of the past in terms of bills will find that the normal mixture has been placed before the House this session. The opposition parties have between them some 25 supply days. They have not had the courage to grasp this particular nettle. We could talk about the question of Uganda. We could talk about regional disparity. We could talk about almost any question that members wish to talk about. But during those 25 days we have not had any example forthcoming from the opposition. I would be the last to say that opposition members should debate questions of substance. Obviously, they are more at home with questions of procedure. Obviously, they are at home when they do not have to deal with issues as perceived by the Canadian people.

What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that the House of Commons is not focusing on the debates in this country. What it means is that we, as members of parliament, are writing ourselves out of national debates, that this chamber and this parliament is not participating as it ought. To me, Mr. Speaker, that is the greatest offence with which one can charge the House of Commons. We are the politicians. We are elected to participate in public debates. Yet because of the way we have lacked the courage to face up to our outmoded procedures we cannot find the time in this chamber to participate in public debates.

I have great sympathy for the proposition that has been put forward by Her Majesty's opposition in terms of \$1 items. I feel that the time was not ripe for this particular debate, anticipating as it does the Speaker's ruling when it was well known to all hon. members that the ruling would come down today. It has put the House in a terribly embarrassing position, whether or not one is in support of the issue or opposed to it. It was, in short, a stupid motion.

I want to urge Her Majesty's opposition to do a great deal to bring about a better House of Commons. I do not want to personally blame the Leader of the Opposition or his House leader, but I have come to the conclusion that one of the reasons that this House of Commons is so weak is that, by and large, the parties in it are so weak. They do not have that much internal cohesion; they have little or no cohesion on issues.

I think if one is to be honest and face up to the reality that is facing the House leaders on the other side, they probably have more knife scars in their backs than any other members with the exception of the leaders of the their respective parties. I have considerable sympathy for them as they try to manoeuvre to cope in some way with the divided groups that they happen to lead. At the same time, because they are unable to impose any discipline upon themselves, I feel it is becoming necessary for the government to introduce measures which are going to provide for this necessity for discipline. I have come reluctantly to this position. It does not jell with what I have said in the past, but I invite the government to bring forth measures which will impose some form of discipline on this institution

[Mr. Reid.]

lest we wash it away with our own inability to control ourselves.

**Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont):** Mr. Speaker, we have been treated to a most unusual performance on the part of government spokesmen this afternoon. One of the most interesting facets of this particular performance is that it seems to be a recycling of an old song-and-dance team. It passes my understanding why the government should feel it is in their interest to recycle the former House leader and the former parliamentary secretary to the House leader. One can only conclude that all the government ministers, including the present parliamentary secretaries, are so embarrassed by their own government's performance that they are unwilling to stand up and defend what has to be one of the shoddiest performances that we have witnessed in many a year, and that is saying something in view of the government that sits before us today.

When the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) said at the outset of his remarks a few moments ago that the House is in a remarkably absurd position, the only thing that is really absurd is the performance of this government. If there was any necessity to make this point, I think the point was well and truly made by the Speaker a few moments ago when he made his ruling on the practice that we are currently debating this afternoon.

I thought, if I may say so, it was almost childish—I am sorry the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Sharp) is not here—that he should open his remarks by saying such things as that he had serious misgivings about raising this matter again this afternoon. He thought that surely an hour or two yesterday afternoon would be enough to dispense with the matter and that we could await the Speaker's ruling. I suppose the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River really had no better song to sing than that of his former mentor and was forced to pursue the same line of reasoning, which has to be one of the weakest in the books.

I do not know whether the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River heard the Speaker a few moments ago clearly distinguish between what parliament should be doing and the procedure under which it should do it. I heard no recognition at all in the comments of the former government House leader, the hon. member for Eglinton, or those of his former parliamentary secretary, with respect to distinguishing proper procedures and responsibilities. That is what this debate is all about.

I noticed that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River neglected to read the motion, though I presume that at some time during this debate or later he will do so. The motion clearly states that it is the substantive approach by government with respect to these \$1 items that is very much the preoccupation of this debate. I should like to read the motion again. The hon. member is still in the chamber, so perhaps he would listen to it if he has not already read it:

That in the opinion of this House the government's use of dollar items further diminishes the proper control of the House of Commons over expenditure, and additionally, circumvents the right of the House to fully discuss the creation of new policies, programs and agencies.