

*Supply—Mr. Nasserden*

● (8:40 p.m.)

I think of hon. gentlemen opposite who went to the province of Saskatchewan realizing the peculiar circumstances in regard to solution mining, their utter failure to comprehend what was needed and their utter failure to show even a sympathetic appreciation of that problem, in the words of our premier, who is a member of the party opposite.

Now, sir, you have heard a great deal about the need of restoring parliament, of giving some of that dignity to this institution that will inspire all Canadians, including those of us on this side of the house and those on the other side. But when we look back to what happened in the last parliament, what do we see? We see the way the business of the House of Commons was handled, not only to frustrate those of us who sat in opposition and had a job to do but to frustrate those of you who sit in the backbenches opposite, and also have a job to do in the House of Commons. The tremendous impression that I get in this particular debate is that you have been told to keep quiet—I am speaking now of what you have been told by your front benchers—so that the government can try to sneak these things past the opposition at the present time. "Don't do anything to irritate them"—this is the kind of tactic being employed at the present time.

We have only to look back to what happened during the last parliament and remember the plea that was made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) for a majority, then see those empty cabinet benches and the government asking for supply today, to realize that there is still the same arrogance across the way. When we see this attitude on the part of the government, Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but feel that we are indeed facing one of the most critical periods in the history of this country.

This is a house of minorities, and when we see hon. gentlemen opposite so sure and so smug that some segment of this house is going to support them regardless of the circumstances, it cannot help but make one wonder whether we are going to be able to restore to parliament that dignity of which I spoke only a few minutes ago.

It is one thing to say—as some say in this house—that we have been sent here to get on with the business of government; but the business of government in 1966, as it has been down through the years, is that there should be proposals from the government side

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of the house and there should be constructive opposition from the opposition side of the house, giving the people of the country a choice in that particular context. Those who say that we should deny this practice in the House of Commons are asking us to turn our backs on every tradition that is understood and appreciated under the British system of democratic government.

During these last six and a half months we have had an abdication of responsibility by the Prime Minister and the government. We will have the estimates brought before us in a few days time. We have this supply motion before us at the present time. We are asked to rush it through in as great a hurry as we can. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but return to the constitutional question, because I have always believed it to be one of the most important facing this country at the present time.

I cannot help but wonder what position the provinces are in after being led down the garden path, as they have been, by the Prime Minister. I know that the premier of the province of Quebec took a trip across the country last fall and saw some of the beauties, some of the greatness—and some of the handicaps, too, I would imagine—of the western plains. He went on to British Columbia as well. I cannot help remembering that when he came back to the province of Quebec, he came back a different man. He came back convinced—as many of us were at that particular time and in the months before—that Canadians had not reached the stage where we were ready to sit down and hammer out the problems that exist in regard to our constitution.

That does not mean there cannot be discussions, and certainly we in western Canada, and in the province of Saskatchewan in particular, would not only welcome but urge that there be a conference of people from every province in this country to search out not only the differences—which has been the primary purpose of this government—but those things that they have in common, those things toward which they can strive, those things upon which they can build a common community not only in one province but in all provinces of Canada.

That is one of the great challenges that faces us in this parliament and Canadians across the country today. It is one of the reasons I cannot help asking the question, which I have asked in this house before: What does this Prime Minister care about?