

Supply

some foolish exercises such as the ringing of the bells, prompted the NDP leader to say that some Canadians were cynical. Unfortunately, it is true and that cynicism goes beyond the parties and is directed at the institution itself. However, apart from our own experience and the suggestions which could be made to improve the operation of Parliament, the fact remains that we all want the members to play the role that the Canadian people think they ought to play.

I have taken it upon myself, Mr. Speaker, and I assure you that I do not claim to have the monopoly on truth, of putting on the Order Paper on February 23 last a motion which seeks to conciliate in the abstract or at least which attempts to launch a debate on a well-defined aspect of our parliamentary activities, the committee system. I must regretfully admit that in the past few years I have lost faith in the House to a certain extent. When I refer to the House, I mean the House gathered here with all its members present and I am rather inclined to work in committees. Why? Perhaps because the groups are smaller, the issues more specific, there are fewer representatives from the media as well as less partisanship, but it is still possible sometimes for a parliamentarian to make a useful contribution.

I have, therefore, centred my attention on the committee system which, I am sorry to say, Mr. Speaker, does not operate very well, to try to strike a new balance between the opposing forces which might promote the creativity of an hon. member while safeguarding the legitimate aspirations of the government, because, as the system and the people so require, the government must govern. I will not explain my motion in detail, Mr. Speaker, for it would serve no useful purpose at this time, but, I want to say that as we are dealing with parliamentary reform, if we really want to promote this creativity which we should show at all times instead of only once in a while, we will have to strike a new balance between the opposing forces.

Let me give you an idea of what Parliament could be. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, a committee on which I had the honour to sit, which has done in fact a tremendous job and whose efforts have resulted in a bill that had gone through the various legislative stages fairly quickly.

● (1710)

I also had the privilege to be a member of one of the task forces set up by this government and approved by the House at the beginning of this session. I must say that it is probably the most fascinating and certainly the most positive experience I have had here, and it is undoubtedly the most constructive and dynamic development to take place in the House in quite a while and which some members who have been in the House longer than I can probably remember. Why? Because a number of small groups with well-defined terms of reference and fairly large working resources, and especially terms of reference entirely devoid of partisanship, I mean, these groups of seven parliamentarians finally managed to rid themselves of

the old reflexes and the absolutely intolerable weight of partisanship and petty politics to carry out constructive work. And you can see the results, these substantial reports which both the Canadian Parliament and the general public have received with relief.

My time is almost up, Mr. Speaker, so I will simply conclude by commenting on the issue raised earlier by the Leader of the Official Opposition about giving members more freedom when divisions are taken, in other words to free members on both sides of the House of any party commitment on certain bills. Ideally, of course I fully agree, Mr. Speaker, and I repeat that I applauded the Leader of the Official Opposition when he made that suggestion. But would not that be putting the cart before the horse, for if we are to relinquish the party guidelines which have set our course for so long, that means we would have to acquire self-discipline, Mr. Speaker, and that is something we cannot draw out of a magician's hat. We will have to learn to discipline ourselves as parliamentarians. We have been in shackles for so long that we will have to learn to act responsibly as individuals. The Leader of the Official Opposition did seem to suggest that hon. members be allowed to drop those shackles, and I agree with him, but at the same time we would have to set up new mechanisms to enable members to learn to work individually and constructively without those party guidelines so that we will at last be able to come to grips with that basic proposal since the very essence of the British parliamentary system is at stake, namely, responsible government. And once we have reached that stage it will mean that the House has fully grown up and that it operates in the eighties rather than in the past when things were probably simpler.

Mr. Speaker, I am gratified that we are discussing parliamentary reform. I hope the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization will soon, in fact very soon, have an opportunity to consider this matter. All I can say is that I hope the show of good will sparked by the events of the last two weeks will not subside in a matter of days. We must not fall back into our routine of saying: Well, parliamentary reform can be discussed later when we have a better consensus or when there is a better show of confidence by the House. We must understand that confidence is what we are going to get as a result of parliamentary reform and not the other way around. All members of this House must get involved in this discussion as soon as possible, and tangible proposals must be made without delay so that, as was said earlier by the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), they can at least be tested, if we want to become better Members of Parliament and play a useful role in this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Friesen: I think the hon. member has a minute or two left in which to speak. Would he entertain a question?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Agreed.