

I would like to refer to a speech given by the Late John Diefenbaker in 1949 to the Empire Club of Canada. He said this:

If parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition must fearlessly perform its functions. When it properly discharges them the preservation of our freedom is assured... It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and moulds public opinion by voice and vote. I must scrutinize every action by the government.

Mr. Diefenbaker concluded:

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the opposition, whatever its policies and tactics may be, shares with the Government and, of course, with the electorate, the responsibility of making our form of democracy, based on parliamentary institutions, work for the welfare of all the citizens.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Diefenbaker is absolutely right.

Mr. Smith: I would like to refer to the comments of Sir Ivor Jennings, the great constitutional expert, when he talked about the Opposition. He said this:

The Opposition's task is not to prevent the Government from carrying out its policy but to criticize that policy in the hope that the electors will choose a different Government next time.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Ivor Jennings is right also.

Mr. Smith: I could go on quoting from Sir Ivor Jennings. However, it is important to realize that the Opposition has a very responsible role to play which, quite frankly, under the leadership of the Hon. Member for the Yukon, it has not been living up to. I feel that he has not been a positive influence. It is not the Government, Mr. Speaker, which has tried to prevent debate in this House. It is not the Government which has refused Hon. Members the right to vote. It is not the Government which has refused to allow Bills to be introduced, and it is not the Government which rang the bells for over two weeks, although we are not without fault. We have entered into these recommendations as an experiment.

I believe that the point made by the Hon. Member for St. John's East with respect to Ministers' statements is a valid one. I feel that if we could come to some reasonable agreement on whose time it would be taken from, if anyone's time, perhaps we could see more of that. However, there must be a desire on the part of every person in the House to make Parliament work for the benefit of all Canadians. I for one am very anxious to see that happen. I for one am anxious to see us perhaps enter into a new era, after the events of this weekend have occurred, regardless of what the outcome may be. Can we not pull together and try to give Canadians a House which functions, a House which works, regardless of our partisan differences? Some of these points which have been made have been valid, but when the Official Opposition is putting up over 100 speakers on Bills—and we have had three examples of that in recent months alone—no one can suggest for a minute that that is not probably the most outrageous flouting of parliamentary tradition which we have ever seen in the House.

• (1710)

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this motion standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Yukon has brought about useful debate.

Supply

I think his contribution to it was very negative. I do not regret the fact he will not be in that role next week because when he is gone I hope we will have an occupant of that seat who will approach this House with a positive attitude and, in contrast to the Hon. Member for Yukon, try to make it work.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I notice my friend referred to the speech of the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and the problem with respect to ministerial statements. I take it he is anxious that there be some way in which this would be preserved, and the Government wants to preserve it but not at the price of losing legislative time. Let me just say that I am not going to lay a trap. I happen to agree with that. I was Government House Leader once and I understand the concern over time, but I also think there is some importance to Parliament that statements be made in this House rather than outside at press conferences and in other places.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary agree that it is reasonable for us to consider, having regard to the fact that we have vacant time, so to speak, at nights, that statements might be made in the latter part of an afternoon, after markets have closed if necessary? It could be perhaps at 6.30 or 6 o'clock, perhaps during the period of the adjournment debate. Would he agree that we begin the practice of having statements made in the House, perhaps using the free time which the rule changes have made available to use for House time for a limited purpose and without interfering with the work of committees?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for that question. I think the point he makes is a valid one. I think it is desirable to have more major policy statements made by Ministers in the House. But in order to do that we have to have a reasonable agreement that this is not taken from Government time. The current system is such that by and large if we were to have Ministers make statements on either Opposition days or private Members' days, the Hon. Member knows full well that there would be an outcry.

The real problem is that in order to reach an agreement there has to be a mood, atmosphere or climate of good faith and good will on both sides of the House. Until there has been a demonstration of that on the part of the Official Opposition with regard to second reading debates, where they are not putting up 50, 60, 70 or 80 speakers, I am afraid I could not sell that to my colleagues. I had to work quite hard to sell this experiment to some of my colleagues on this side of the House. The Hon. Member knows that. I did it because I believed in it, and I would happily do the same thing again, but I say to the Hon. Member that in order for that to be brought about we need some reasonable attitudes to be shown on the part of the Official Opposition with regard to second reading debates. This sort of obstruction—and it is on the part of the leadership, not the rank and file; I am not accusing anyone present in