

Procedure of Legislative Program

opment Incentives Act and many other important pieces of legislation.

Despite the words of the Leader of the Opposition about a left-over bill, which I hope will be facing him shortly, this Parliament has undertaken the most extensive reform of the Canadian taxation system in our history. I am not complaining about this. I have noticed, however, that in this session the opposition has spent at least part of its time on political campaigning. In fact, I am told that some of the Leader of the Opposition's colleagues are concerned about how badly he has misjudged the date of the election. Instead of spending his time boning up on the legislative program, he has spent a good deal of time campaigning around the country.

I am not scandalized at the fact that parties should get immersed in politics, but I do not think we should blind ourselves to the effect that that preoccupation has on the legislative program of the House of Commons. I have not complained about it, but I find it a bit galling to have the Leader of the Opposition and his House leader complain about the appalling record of legislative progress, a record which they have extensively participated in creating.

Today is the seventy-eighth sitting day of this session. Let me say first of all that more than 40 per cent of that time has been spent on business other than government legislation. I have personally regretted every single day that was lost to the legislative process, but we did have to meet our parliamentary commitments by spending a day on the Speech from the Throne, which was so popular in February and so unpopular in June—or is it the other way round—eight more days for the address debate, an important debate, and six days on the budget. The hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) was demanding that we complete that debate. Today is the eighteenth day spent on the business of supply, opposition days, and two days—or was it one—were spent on the motion of the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Pringle) on that memorable occasion when we accepted his motion in the House of Commons.

All I am saying is that in this session we have had 43 days available for government legislation. And what has happened to these 43 days? On February 17, the Prime Minister tabled a list of proposed legislation for this session. It consisted of 29 items. We have added some since, all items that were popularly received, such as the old age pension increase, the veterans pension increase, the new pension bill that was given first reading yesterday, and one or two others. But of the original 29, the government has made a deliberate attempt to get as many through Parliament as possible. Of those 29 bills only six remain to be brought forward and three of them require the completion of consultation with the provinces or with the private sector as promised in the Speech from the Throne.

I believe that is a pretty good record. It is nothing to be ashamed of, considering the dynamic world in which we are living. We know perfectly well that items of legislation are dying in the House because members find them not very important or refuse to pass them. Since February we have brought forward 23 of these items; they are all on the order paper and available for discussion. What has happened to these bills? Without casting any reflection, I must

[Mr. MacEachen.]

say that the House has not shown any real readiness to deal with these bills reasonably rapidly. As I have said so often, in the British House they spent a maximum of two days on second reading. Probably they give most bills second reading in a day or less. Of course, if we had done that in this House there would be no need to complain about the legislative pace.

• (1650)

Let us go back to the 43 days. On five of the 43 days we debated second reading of Bill C-4, the CNR financing and guarantee bill. It has not received second reading yet.

Mr. Benjamin: And you know why.

Mr. MacEachen: Of course I know why—because there is a price tag attached to the passage of the bill. I understand that and I accept it. I accept the capability of any person in this House to refuse passage of a bill. I am just pointing out that we have had five days on second reading and the bill is still where it started. We spent at least nine of the 43 days, and probably all of them, on second reading of the Family Income Security Plan bill. That bill is out of committee, at report stage. The federal-provincial fiscal relations bill took four days on second reading and two days at report stage, for a total of six days. Those four bills, Mr. Speaker, only one of which is passed and is now the law of Canada, took 24 of the 43 days that were available for government legislation in this session.

I say this to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all hon. members, harping back to the debate that we had on time allocation, that if the House of Commons takes 24 days to complete one bill and partially complete three others, we are not measuring up to the requirements of modern life and the requirements of a modern legislature.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: I leave it at that. I make no complaints; I merely state the facts. As the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert said, this side proposes and that side disposes. That is how that side disposed of these items of government legislation.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. MacEachen: I now want to refer to the days that are set aside so that the opposition may tell Parliament what policies it would like to bring forward. I realize that the opposition must criticize; it must bring the government to task. But surely in our system of government, with an official opposition having had 50 days in this Parliament all to itself to bring forward alternative policies, with that kind of opportunity this House and the country should know where the official opposition in particular stands on all questions of public policy. But we do not. And they do not, which is worse.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: We have had carping criticism. We have had one motion after another repeating the same tired, bilious platitudes. To date we have had fourteen motions on unemployment from the Leader of the Opposition and his party. The same wine has been put in differ-