

Supply—Privy Council

However, my hon. friend has not answered my question; he has not dealt with the topic under discussion. I put a simple question to the member for Champlain. I did not ask why the leader of the Ralliement Cr ditiste was away today. I said that of all the members he is probably the least regular at the house since the beginning of the session.

Mr. Matte: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member for Trois-Rivi res should know that on those days where the leader of the Ralliement Cr ditiste was away from the house he was, as a Canadian delegate, attending a meeting of French-speaking parliamentarians in Paris. The leader was away only on those days, except for the absence the member for Abitibi has just mentioned. I feel that the responsibilities are even greater in the case of ministers. Obviously, making comparisons of the type the member for Trois-Rivi res has just made is just too easy a way of trying to settle a question of principle. And it is not because the honourable member for Trois-Rivi res has managed to find a good place for himself, that he should attempt, with his arrogance—and I say it again—to influence us.

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a question of privilege.

My honourable colleague for Champlain said that the honourable member for Trois-Rivi res has found a good place for himself; that expression is already disparaging. He also adds that the honourable member for Trois-Rivi res shows arrogance which is also disparaging. I should like to point out to him that he has not been in this house very long and we just realized it, after hearing his last remarks.

[English]

The Chairman: Order, please. There is no question of privilege.

[Translation]

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, you do not know whether or not I am rising on a question of privilege. You did not give me time to finish—

[English]

Mr. Perrault: Mr. Chairman, I have listened with interest to the arguments which have been advanced during the past few hours with respect to the rights, privileges and freedoms of members of this House of Commons. I speak as one who has had considerable experience as a member of an opposition.

An hon. Member: Hurrah.

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Mr. Perrault: I appreciate the importance of the opposition. A government is only as good as the quality of the opposition. I should not like to see any rights taken away from the opposition in this house or diminished in any way. However, I should like to suggest—

Mr. Danforth: Now comes the brick.

Mr. Perrault:—that the attempts to establish a case in the past few hours by the members of the opposition are based on a vastly overstated position regarding what we are discussing in this house.

We have heard some strong language. The word "arrogant" has been used. We have heard hon. members talk about the government "muzzling" their right to speak. We have heard members suggest that there are restrictions on their freedom contemplated by this proposal of the government to make ministers of the crown available for questioning on three days each week.

• (3:30 p.m.)

It has been suggested to this House of Commons that in some fashion democracy in Canada is being subverted. Let me tell you this, that after being a guest in many legislative assemblies across this country, after serving in my own legislature for nine years and after visiting the House of Commons of Great Britain, one of the most profound impressions I have received thus far is that the degree of democracy which exists in the House of Commons of Canada is as high as, if not higher than anywhere in the commonwealth. I suggest to the opposition that they will be unable to cite any other assembly in the commonwealth where the opposition is granted more rights and freedom than right here in our house. In the light of what is very much a fact, it seems to me the language being employed in this house by the opposition is patently political and the motivations are political. If we compare our rules of procedure with those which exist in other parliamentary forums, we find that as much democracy exists in Canada in this house, as in any forum in the world one could mention.

We have an oral question period. In many parliamentary systems they do not have an oral question period. I think this institution is a great advantage. But it seems to me that the oral question period also imposes on the opposition a responsibility to be reasonable. Many questions are good, but, at times I have listened aghast to some of the questions from opposition members. On these occasions, it is