

Adjournment on Completion of Business

I am fully aware of all the arguments for our having a recess. I am fully aware of the particular reason for this motion. I am fully aware of the desire of those engaged in another contest to have the opportunity to do that. But I think we have a prior obligation to the people of Canada to do something about the problems that are facing them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: One of those problems is the high cost of living. The one specific piece of legislation this government has given us that will do something about the high cost of living is Bill C-190, which is designed in such a way as to bring down the cost of drugs to the people of this country. This is something the government has boasted about. It is one of two responses the government has made to the report of the special committee which recommended that something be done about drug prices. The government has boasted to high heaven about what it is going to do, and now it asks us to pass a resolution which in effect closes out any passing of that bill at this point in the session.

I stand here, Mr. Speaker, and make the assertion that if the bill is not dealt with now it will not be dealt with in this session. I have already cited the case of the superannuated civil servants who were asked to wait last July. They are still being asked to wait, those who have not died in the meantime. I remember that some years ago we had a government bill having to do with the Government Annuities Act. We were asked to wait until after a certain recess to deal with that bill. When we came back after the recess nothing was done, and that bill also died on the order paper.

I mention that bill in particular because the situation then parallels the situation which now faces us. The Government Annuities Act amendment of that year, about 1950 or 1951, was a government measure brought in with a great deal of fanfare; but then an insurance company lobby developed against the bill, and the lobby won. The government put the bill over until after the recess and that ended it.

We have the same situation now. We have a government bill of which the government has boasted. But there has been a terrific lobby against it by the pharmaceutical industry, and if this motion is passed and further consideration of the bill is put over until later, that lobby is such that the legislation will not be passed. Any assurances that this matter will be dealt with when we come back on

[Mr. Knowles.]

April 23 might as well not be given, because they are not worth the time it takes to give them. I say that on the basis of experiences I have had, two of which I have cited, with this present government and a previous Liberal government.

We do not quarrel with April 23 as the date of our returning. We do not quarrel with the idea of a recess that is a little longer than the usual Easter recess, particularly in view of the Liberal convention that is to be held. But we still say that to the Liberals as well as to the rest of us the interests of the people of Canada should come first, and one of the things about which we could do something is the price of drugs.

My hon. friends opposite keep referring to matters of courtesy and the fact that they let others hold conventions without parliament being in session. I would remind hon. members opposite that when they had a convention in 1948 they managed to do it in such a way that parliament did not meet at all. That was the last time a party in power changed leaders. Parliament prorogued on June 30, 1948, and did not meet again until late in January, 1949, so the Liberals had ample time in that period to carry on their campaign and elect their new leader. It is the present Prime Minister who chose to give his resignation and to precipitate the leadership campaign while parliament is in session. He is responsible for this situation, but he has said repeatedly that the business of parliament comes first; in fact he said so several times in the last few weeks.

The Prime Minister has said the business of parliament comes first, even ahead of the Liberal leadership convention. This motion denies that statement. The motion says in effect that the Liberal leadership convention must come ahead of legislation to bring down the price of drugs. A statement was made a little while ago about another matter, namely the curtailing of health services in the north. I was very interested in the way Shaun Heron referred to this move on television, and spoke of the shabby values which some of the leadership candidates are giving us in this respect.

This motion is another case of shabby values. The right of the Liberal leadership candidates to travel around the country to try to win that coveted place is put ahead of their responsibility in parliament to deal with a matter which has been before us for a couple of years. This is not an opposition motion; it is not a proposal of ours. This is a government measure about which the government