

Private Members' Business

is what has been bothering me for 10 years as a parliamentarian. That was the missing link and the member for Hamilton West gave it to us. "I will faithfully observe the laws and Constitution of Canada and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen", leaving in all the rest: "I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II".

Many Canadians of non-British descent will say: "I am not British. Why should I swear to that?" I am not of British or French descent. But our Parliament is based on the British parliamentary system and by leaving that in we are respecting our heritage. By putting the additions in we are respecting all the other heritages that go into making up this country: of the aboriginal peoples, of the francophones, of the anglophones, et cetera.

We could have made history in this House of Commons on the opening day, but we blew it. We blew it because the whip of the government party does not read the order papers. He did not know what was going to be on the Order Paper. His first question was to the member for Hamilton West: "Did you negotiate for an agreement?" After all we heard on the TV programs, how we were going to bring decorum back to the House, how we were going to co-operate, these were the whip's opening remarks.

The member for Hamilton West is not asking that this be made law today. He wants it referred to a legislative committee. The hon. member opposite asked if there could be participation and input from Canadians. Yes, the committee could recommend that.

What is wrong with referring this to committee for further debate, further study, and improving our whole parliamentary system? It is very sad for the Whip to stand and say: "Did you negotiate an agreement?" It is very sad to open on such a note.

Mr. David Bjornson (Selkirk—Red River): Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to making some comments on this particular motion by the member for Hamilton West.

I guess first off I will agree with the member for Parkdale—High Park. I also spent some time in the constituency over the Christmas break and found out that the people of my constituency were concerned

about constitutional reform. As with all of the comments made so far in this debate, that discussion about this particular motion is specifically lined up toward an important part of constitutional reform.

I question the relevancy at this time of this particular motion. In all of the discussions that people in the area I represent and following the discussions in these various meetings that are happening right now with the joint House-Senate committee, never once did we hear this one particular issue.

The members of my riding wrote quite a significant report on the various proposals brought forward by the government and the discussions that are going on right now. Not once did I hear this particular issue come up.

I am not saying it is not important because I think it is. The member for Hamilton West has brought forward quite a significant issue. We are concerned about the economy. We are concerned about Senate reform and, as the member for Parkdale—High Park just commented about parliamentary reform, is this the time or the place to be discussing the change of the oath of allegiance?

I say not. We should get on to the issues that are really important to the people of our country. I am not saying that this issue is not important. Unfortunately the people in my constituency and the people throughout Canada have never raised this issue. Nobody has come forward to me and said: "Mr. Bjornson, as our representative would you change your oath?"

In terms of the relevancy of this particular motion today, although I think sometimes we should take a long hard look at it, what we should be doing is listening to our constituents right now and reacting to their concerns. They have some very legitimate concerns. We should be going out and doing the parliamentary reform so that we do not have the comments that were just made by the member for Parkdale—High Park.

It is important to re-evaluate this motion. It is unfortunate that we do not have questions in this type of debate, but I would put this question to the member for Hamilton West and I probably will after the debate is finished: Why has he not taken this to the joint House-Senate committee for discussion? Why has that arena not been used to forward his specific motion rather than