

Procedure and Organization

government concludes it is rules which make parliament work, we will soon work to rule and show them that attitude does not make sense.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): I have not been here for many years but I have learned one thing. I have learned that it is the attitude and willingness to work on all sides of the house which makes this parliament function. No amount of rule changes or additions to the rule book will provide a parliament of which we can be proud. If the government thinks it has contributed something worthwhile to this parliament this day, then they have been very sadly misled.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): I think we must admit very sadly that the actions indicated by the government house leader today are a very real travesty of the potential purpose of this place. Members of the government have talked about the need for parliamentary reform. With that I wholeheartedly concur. Reform, however, does not start by bludgeoning minorities in this place. Reforms will not be achieved by suddenly reversing 700 years of parliamentary history.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Reforms will not be achieved by souring the will of individual members of this house. What the government has arrived at quite frankly is a confused set of priorities which show very little understanding of this place. I should like to indicate briefly some of the priorities which need to be dealt with which have not yet been seriously looked at by this government. Surely, the basic question is how can we make this house more responsive to public thought and participation. Participatory democracy may be a slogan with little meaning for some people but behind that slogan there is the urgent need that parliament become more responsive or more sensitive to public opinion in this country. What is needed for this place is not less responsibility, as proposed by the government, but more.

In parliamentary reform there is a need for greater legislative initiative and responsibility but there has been little leadership from the government in this regard. One might speak of the need for more and better assistance for individual members and the need of a more creative role for them to play. One could also

talk about the need for more effective machinery by which to review the work done by departments and the whole administration. One could spend a good deal of time talking about the kind of committee system which would really work and be responsible. All these things are priorities, but not in the thinking of this government. Rather this government regards parliament as a nuisance and therefore would rather introduce government by dictatorship.

• (8:30 p.m.)

Behind all this I sense a tremendous danger for ourselves and for this country. One does not need to remind anyone in this chamber perhaps that there is still a very large amount of cynicism about, and alienation in respect of, the processes of government not only in our country but in many other countries. We know only too well the degree to which young people, particularly university students, have become disaffected with our system of self-government. What we have seen evidence of today is a widening of this gulf between the government and the people. We are not closing the gap if all of us, as members of this place, are not prepared to deal realistically with the situation, and if the name of the game is only a greater concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands. That being the case, the answer will be altogether too obvious because there will be people in the streets, there will be a revolution and there will be a rejection not only of those institutions which have served us well in the past but of many of the individual rights and freedoms that each of us cherish.

I close by asking all members to think seriously about the step which has been proposed by this government. When Neil Armstrong landed on the moon he talked about a great leap for mankind. We see here the potential initiation of a leap for this country which quite tragically will not be forward, but backward. This is something which all members must refuse to accept.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I should like initially to express the feeling of regret and shame which has been developing over the last few months and which thousands of people in Canada have today. There is a feeling of regret and shame within people as a result of what took place a year ago in June. During the election campaign, as everyone knows, there was great admiration developed for the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).