

Division Bells Procedure

Mr. Nielsen: I deplore that kind of conduct when we on this side have displayed in this House of Commons our adherence to using that issue as an issue for unity rather than disunity.

The roots of this problem go far deeper than most Members here can recall. One or two of us sat here in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1962 and 1963. That was an occasion when the Liberal Opposition of the day had some 45 Members against the overwhelming majority of the then Prime Minister Diefenbaker. As Mr. Pearson himself called it, "that happy band of warriors" held up in the House the Estimates of the day for 49 days, refusing supply, deliberately obstructing the House and, indeed, forcing the Government of the day to go to Governor General's warrants in order to pay the salaries of the Public Service. Yet in this day and age, when we as a responsible Opposition attempt to use the tools remaining, we are called obstructive. When the Government does it, it whines about the weather, or about uncontrollable events; but when we do it, it is called obstruction.

I have no quarrel with what was done by the "four horsemen of the apocalypse", as they were called in those days—Mr. Chevrier, Mr. Pearson, Mr. Pickersgill and Mr. Martin. They were magnificent parliamentarians all, doing what they thought was a responsible job in opposition—and it was, Mr. Speaker.

Therein lies the root of the problem. After the 1963 election we of course changed sides; Mr. Pearson and his Liberal Party took office and we moved to this side of the House. One of the first things that the Government did was look at the Standing Orders and say: "By George, we cannot ever be caught in a situation where we can be prevented from getting our program through, as we did to the Conservatives when they were in office".

The method used to avoid being subjected to the same terms as we had been subjected to when they were in opposition, was to change the Standing Orders. In the process the effectiveness of the Opposition was weakened. The tools it had hitherto possessed in order to discharge its responsible function as an Opposition were taken away. In doing that, the Opposition was left with precious few tools with which to oppose when it believes that opposition is warranted. All it is left with are the tactics that we have used that focus on ringing the bells or moving dilatory motions such as the one moved yesterday. That is all the Government has left any opposition as tools with which to perform its functions.

In effect, we have reached the stage where the Prime Minister's oft-quoted remark is closer to the truth than many people believe—that Members of Parliament, when they are 50 feet off the Hill, are nobodies—because the place is becoming irrelevant in terms of the institutional structure itself—a parliamentary government and a parliamentary opposition.

I agree with the Government House Leader that the Government is there to govern; that is its mandate. But the Government has to admit that the Opposition has a function to perform as well, and that function is to oppose where Opposition—in its view, not the Government's—is essential. It has to be provided with the tools to present that opposition.

We are left with a psychology where we are compelled to the conclusion that unless we do things the way the Government thinks we should do them, we are guilty of obstruction. That is not a good approach to the maintenance of this institution and what it is supposed to be in the parliamentary sense.

Now I want to say a word about yesterday. The Government, through the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde), tells us that the borrowing Bill before us for \$29.5 billion will be sufficient to cover its needs right through to March 31, 1985. That is what he said; that is all the money the Government needs. We believe that is an overstatement, but nonetheless we are debating the Bill now. Then the Government came along the day before yesterday with a notice—

Mr. Evans: Don't mislead the House.

Mr. Nielsen: I will not even bother—

Mr. Evans: You had better not.

Mr. Nielsen:—replying to that inferential charge from an Hon. Member who has not been here long enough to appreciate the implications of what he is saying.

After telling the House that all it needs to cover its entire requirements for the fiscal year is \$29.5 billion, two days later the Government puts a notice on the Order Paper asking for authority to borrow a further \$4 billion, which makes the total \$33.5 billion.

Mr. Evans: What did our House Leader say yesterday?

Mr. Nielsen: If the Hon. Member would just keep quiet for a moment, as I did when his House Leader spoke, and allow me to complete my remarks, I will get to his question. I think he should at least extend the same kind of courtesy that we extended to the Government House Leader and bless us with his silence.

● (1240)

The Government says that if we give it that further \$4 billion worth of borrowing power, whatever portion it uses it will deduct from the \$29.5 billion—I see the Minister of State for Finance (Mr. MacLaren) nodding in agreement with that—by way of an amendment to be introduced at the committee stage. We do not question that. We do not question the validity of the Government's word in that regard. What we do question is that it needs it.

Why is it bringing forward a Bill for a supplementary \$4 billion when it has cash deposits of \$8.1 billion? April, we know, is a heavy expenditure month. All the bills come in and all the refunds must be made, and the like. However, there are enough cash reserves to cover the demands up to the end of April by more than two times now on deposit with the Government. I see the Minister of State for Finance disagreeing with me there, but that is our advice.

In committee, we asked the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) to explain