

The Address—Miss Bégin

I regret to say, Madam Speaker, that our present debates are something worse than shooting clay pigeons in complete darkness.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Miss Bégin: That is what I have been witnessing for a year and a half, and this Parliament is making a pretty bad start again. Procedures regulating that pigeon shooting appear precarious, mysterious and, earnestly speaking, still too encumbered by procedures and regulations of a House whose members are 15 times as numerous as a committee.

I understand the present credibility of committees is practically nil, and this is illustrated by two other facts: the fact that a committee is unable to initiate a task without a mandate from the Speaker, and the fact that reports from committees that are tabled in the House are not being used. As a newcomer, who still has a lot to learn, I am not convinced but I believe we might wonder whether a simple and quick mechanism should not be designed to enable a committee to ask for and obtain from the House the power to initiate complementary tasks deemed essential.

I believe a good report from a committee should matter once it has been tabled. Besides, the credibility of a committee and the seriousness of its activities should help shorten the duration of speeches by members of the House, as I suggested yesterday, on the third maybe even on the second reading of any bill.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to suggest that the third aspect of committee work—investigations—should be referred only to special committees or special joint committees of the Senate and this House with specific terms of references of the task force or project-oriented types. I typify here the investigation by the need to call witnesses other than ministers and their officials, as well as those responsible for our various government or parastate agencies, to avoid standing committees getting lost in royal commissions of enquiry, and I think I know what I am talking about.

Thus two special terms of references given to the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts in the first session of the last Parliament—needless to say that I am voicing here an entirely personal view—resulted in an imbroglio, and led us to hear respectively 32 and 21 witnesses on top of our regular work. Regular members on the standing committee could have been dispatched to a special committee to examine those two particular terms of references, eventually with other colleagues from the House of Commons.

Those are, Madam Speaker, a few of my thoughts that come to mind in face of the partisanship and the malfunctioning of committees. As a full time member of Parliament, that is the best instrument of work available to me, I would specify the instrument of work that the public can see, because I also consider the caucus as an instrument of work particularly valuable as a source of influence for all members on the government side.

So I consider the time I must spend in committee as important. I want those reforms as do a great number of my colleagues for that matter. The only thing missing is a

[Miss Bégin.]

consensus to avoid partisanship because I consider that the number of other platforms is quite adequate to accept during the time spent in committee to put the lid on or simply put in the freezer partisan passions, contentions for the leadership of certain parties I shall not name, and pre-electoral campaigns on everyone's part, including us.

Last night and again this morning I was told that I was a radical, or an activist. I should have liked to close my speech by quoting two paragraphs written by Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote a book, somewhat the way an entomologist would have done, on democracy in America. He describes our aptitudes as slightly too parochial, and our verbal inflation. Tocqueville wrote those words, which even now could prove embarrassingly timely, in 1835.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Madam Speaker, like all those who spoke before me, I should like to offer my most sincere congratulations to you, to the new Speaker (Mr. Jerome) as well as to the movers (Messrs. Lee and Duclos) of the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. I should also like to congratulate the new hon. members and wish them every success.

Madam Speaker, last spring the government was defeated on the budget. Since then, there has been a general election the results of which we are all aware.

● (1520)

This government has indeed a majority and the public impatiently expects some measures likely to restore a most precarious situation.

As a member of the opposition, I shall demand a great deal from this government in the interest, of course, not only of my constituents but also in the interest of every citizen of Canada.

I shall not explain at length why this government has been defeated, that belongs to the past, and I want to say that given the lack of appropriate measures that would have improved the condition of all Canadians, in view of this state of affairs, it seems that the government's defeat last Spring was warranted. In any event, the people have decided by a vast majority to give a new mandate to this government and I intend to respect the people's wishes, and since the absolute majority of my constituents have trusted me I would like to than them in passing, in a very special manner. And were it for them alone, I have a duty to fill in this Chamber and I fully intend to do so.

Is my duty as a member in the opposition simply to fight the government rightly or not, by mere tradition? Certainly not. Many members must think so. But to those who hold or who are tempted to hold that opinion, I dare say they are mistaken and that people expect from all of us much more objectivity that we have displayed up to now. And this is true for members on both sides of the House.

I think it is about time we accept to work positively and discharge seriously our responsibilities. I will describe some of these later on.

Madam Speaker, I have listened to a number of very interesting speeches. I noted the leader of my party demanded and will demand intensive action for the Canadians. I support him fully. We all know full well that despite the Speech from the Throne, there seems to be a