

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

two hours and 49 minutes, the Social Crediters one hour and 43 minutes—which is a pretty good percentage of the time—and the New Democratic party one hour and 10 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I have to go through this evidence because the Prime Minister made these vague and general statements and the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Churchill) made equally vague and general statements last evening. In view of this we will just look into the facts and try to get the truth, which is a very important thing to do in these situations. The budget resolutions last autumn took up eight days, including four short days, in committee of ways and means. On those discussions—and they were very important discussions on the economic state of the nation—in the budget debate without a budget, as we called it, the Liberals spent six hours and 44 minutes analysing the economy and the government's proposals, if they had any, to deal with the state of the economy, the Social Credit party spent six hours and 19 minutes, the Progressive Conservatives three hours and 36 minutes, and the New Democratic party three hours and 49 minutes. With regard to the debate on the address, the Conservatives spent 14 hours and 16 minutes, and we spent 14 hours and 31 minutes. On the resolution in connection with the farm loan bill, a bill which was so important and so perfect that no change could be made to it, all we had to do was get it through the house at once, the Progressive Conservatives—this was a bill they were supporting and which they did not want to change; all they wanted to do was praise it—spent two hours and 48 minutes, while it took the Liberals two hours and 26 minutes to try to make it a better bill.

Mr. Speaker, that is the evidence to support the record. If, in the face of that record, the Prime Minister and his government want to go to the country on the charge of obstruction, as they tried to do last June, that is perfectly all right with us.

The Prime Minister made great play this afternoon on the improvements in the economy and he produced evidence to support his statement that there has been an encouraging improvement in the economy in recent months. The Prime Minister is, of course, following his usual practice of manufacturing straw men of enormous size so that they will be much more impressive when he knocks them down. He accused us last year of prophesying doom and gloom in the budget debate—

Mr. Diefenbaker: Throughout the campaign,

[Mr. Pearson.]

Mr. Pearson: If the Prime Minister would bother to look at the speech I was able to make in the few minutes which remained after the budget, before dissolution, he will find that my criticism at that time of the minister of finance, now the Minister of Justice (Mr. Fleming) was that he had been a little too pessimistic in his calculations with respect to the economy during the current year. We thought it would be rather better than the prediction the minister of finance had made.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): You cannot support that.

Mr. Pearson: The Prime Minister has talked about greed for office. I would remind the right hon. gentleman that his government, in its determination to go to the polls at a time they thought it would be best for them in order to hold on to office—and I am not complaining about that—called an election a year ago, one year before they needed to do so. They called that election without the budget having been discussed. They called that election knowing a financial crisis was approaching, and the evidence which has been submitted to parliament this session proves this to have been so beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That statement is false.

Mr. Pearson: They called an election in these circumstances hoping they could get through it before the financial crisis occurred in a way which would require devaluation of the dollar during the election period. Unfortunately, the government's calculations were wrong. The financial crisis developed more quickly than they had expected and they had to devalue the dollar under pressure, in crisis conditions, in the middle of an election. In spite of devaluation the financial crisis got worse and worse until we reached the situation which confronted the government the day after the election. What did they do then to get Canada out of that really critical difficulty? They went down to Washington and saw "those people" in Washington and New York. They sent their experts across the border to say: We are in trouble. Will you help us out to the extent of one billion United States dollars?

The Prime Minister had a good deal to say about defence. He was somewhat harsh with me because I had not said anything on defence in my statement yesterday—although I did, I believe, spend some 25 or 30 minutes on the subject of defence, using it as an illustration in support of the amendment we were moving that the government, as a result of its indecisive, weak and contradictory policies is incapable of handling the nation's business. Defence was a good illustration of