

Summer Recess

What I would like to make very clear at this stage in my speech before we adjourn later today, hopefully, is that during those months many people have been made to believe that we have dealt almost solely with the Constitution in this chamber during the last months. This is not the fact. This is not the truth. Let me tell Your Honour that, in fact, the Constitution has required about two months of the time of the House of Commons. The resolution on the Constitution was sent to a special committee which dealt with it during four months. Hence, altogether it is true that we have dealt with this very major and important subject of the Constitution at length and that we have spent six months on the subject; but four of those six months were spent in a committee, allowing this House to be able to deal with some other business.

What kind of other business have we dealt with? I spoke to Your Honour a few minutes ago about 65 bills. Once again, I will not read the list; but let me tell Your Honour that we had a six-day budget debate last fall. We have dealt with major bills related to the economy—the Income Tax Act, borrowing authority bills, the Customs Tariff Act, the Bank Act, fiscal transfers, the Income Tax Conventions Act and the Excise Tax Act. We had 35 allotted days related to the business of supply, and a special two-day debate on the economy just before Christmas. Everyone will remember that.

Therefore, if we add up all those days we spent in the House of Commons which were devoted to the economy and to financial matters, people in this country will realize that we have spent, in fact, much more time on financial matters and on the economy than on any other subject. That must be said very clearly. As I said earlier in my speech, it is the first time in over 20 years that the government has been able to have all the bills related to the budget adopted before the summer adjournment. That is a reality too.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): But interest rates are still at 20 per cent!

Mr. Cullen: We are going to wrestle them to the ground!

● (1410)

Mr. Pinard: There was something very positive also achieved during the session. It is related to some changes in the system. I should like to speak briefly about those parliamentary task forces that were created to deal with different subjects and to say that if, on the one hand, the experiment was very positive and very useful, on the other hand there are aspects that will have to be corrected in order to allow this Parliament still to be able to allow a number of members to be part of an action group and deal with very important subjects, at the same time not disturbing the existing system of standing committees.

[*Translation*]

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that following an agreement between parties, we have set up task forces, parliamentary committees made up of seven members, which is much less

than the normal membership of some 20 members for a standing committee of this House. What the government intended in agreeing to set up those parliamentary task forces was to enable a limited number of seven members from all regions of this country to get together and look fully into highly topical matters, and in so doing to enjoy a great deal of freedom and travel opportunities, technical advice and every facility to produce a report as little partisan as possible which would really enable the government to be acquainted with the real views of the public and those concerned on a given subject. You will recall that those committees have considered alternate energy, the handicapped, the North-South relations, the National Trade Corporation, regulatory reform, employment opportunities for the 80's as well as the renewal of fiscal agreements between the federal government and the provinces. As I said, this experience has had very positive aspects. Those honourable members have done an excellent job. They have worked in a very responsible and efficient manner. I think we can now say that in the reports of those committees, there was an input by members from all over the country, including the maritimes, western Canada and central Canada, which will give more weight to the recommendations made in those reports.

However, on the negative side, there has been an increase in Parliament's costs in order to allow those committees to do their job. The costs have increased very substantially. We know that printing costs have gone up as well as transportation and counselling costs. But I think that was worth it and that in the future we should not cut out those activities just to save money, as I think the loss would outweigh the benefits; but we should not overspend if we want to show our moderation or at least our ability for sound management and efficient control.

But the most negative aspect may have been the disruption of the present standing committee system, as such honourable members who were appointed to the task forces were also very active members of the standing committees. Because of the very long time they had to work on the task forces, they were not always able to take part in the activities of the House standing committees. So I believe we will have to look into that practical problem and try together to find a workable solution. I am quite willing to try and work out an acceptable compromise with representatives of the opposition parties to reach our objective and not place the work of the standing committees in jeopardy.

● (1420)

Offhand, I would make a suggestion subject to amendment or discussion. We might perhaps consider having sub-committees of our existing committees perform the same role, and this might be an indirect way of obtaining the same result without jeopardizing committee work. We might also require that these task forces, these sub-committees, made up of seven members or so only, be empowered to travel outside the period where the committees are dealing with the estimates, between