

*The Address—Mr. Cullen*

Some in this House may have to be reminded from time to time that we are here for the good of Canada and that is our prime responsibility. No one is asked to lose sight of the fact that we are politicians and that we have obligations to our respective parties nor that we, as individuals, are accountable to our constituents. But, in the final analysis, Canada and the betterment of Canada must come first.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Cullen:** We in this House have an awesome responsibility and it far outweighs the immediate responsibility imposed upon the Prime Minister and his cabinet to deal with present day legislation. We, and I mean all members of this House, have an obligation to make the House of Commons more relevant, to establish to the satisfaction of the citizens of Canada that the government has the single, most important role to play in the development of our country. Our legislation, our conduct, our rules and our dedication all receive the daily scrutiny of the press, radio and television. The legislation of the present Liberal government receives the criticism, constructive and, unfortunately, sometimes otherwise, of the opposition parties. In the various committees of the House this legislation is reviewed, criticized, amended and reported back to the House. This legislation is then subject to amendment and these amendments are debated. There are many safeguards before proposed legislation becomes law and this is as it should be.

It is difficult however to explain to the citizen of Canada who is not familiar with these procedures the necessity for taking time and having safeguards. But that self-same citizen has a good point. I think we must be careful in the House of Commons that we do not take too much time. We must look at the program of legislative proposals, establish the priorities, and then calculate the time which is available to us if we are to ensure that this legislative program will be adopted within the time available.

Rule changes were of course a must and all parties agreed. We could not agree on all of the rule changes and so the government, quite properly, had to accept responsibility for Rules 75A, 75B and 75C, in the hope that they will serve to expedite the business of this House. I am not so naïve as to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the business of this House can be expedited by the initiative of the governing party alone. I recognize we require

[Mr. Cullen.]

co-operation from the opposition parties, no matter what the rules state. The thing that does concern me, however, and I can assure Your Honour it also concerns the people of Canada, is whether we in this House have not become too conservative, with a small "c", about the passage of legislation and whether we are not taking too much time rather than too little with our legislation. When we spend too much time and have too many speakers, do the speeches themselves lose their significance?

● (3.10 p.m.)

I am not looking to make this House of Commons a sausage factory or a rubber stamp office for government legislation, but I would like to see debates on important legislation hold the attention of this House, of the various media of publicity, and of the citizens of our country. I would like to see this House of Commons filled with members during the debating period. On one or two occasions in the past year, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has used the phrase "the cut and thrust of debate". Mr. Speaker, some of the debates in this chamber have been carried on with old, rusty swords—and some of the swords were not even taken out of the scabbards. The hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Bell) gave a first class address on the need of a merchant marine in Canada, but very few even of his own party members were present during that debate, albeit it took place during the private members' hour. The emptying of the press gallery after the question period should surely tell us something.

Consider this. When constituents come to the House of Commons during the afternoon, some members explain apologetically that their colleagues are not present in the house because they are attending committee meetings, or are busy back in their constituencies. Then, when they get into the gallery, these visitors look down to see members who are present reading their newspapers and paying little or no attention to the man who is speaking at the time. How do we convince the press, how do we convince the people of Canada, how do we convince ourselves that this House has any real significance when it cannot hold the attention of the very members who compose it?

The *Sarnia Observer* in an editorial on July 22 entitled "Weaker by the Week" stated:

The real threat to parliament isn't the possible danger of cutting off productive and informative debate on a measure, but the steady erosion of