

Business of the House

reform legislation itself was before the House for 50 days, the government organization bill was before the House for 23 days, and the Public Order Act was before the House for 14 days. I regret somewhat that that large number of days was spent, for example, on the Government Organization Act and on the Public Order Act. I feel, however, that probably the 50 days spent on the tax reform legislation was justified in view of its size and importance.

Aside and apart from the rather long period spent on these two other bills, government organization and public order, the House did proceed with dispatch to complete its consideration of public bills. I might mention that probably the reason so much time was spent on these two latter bills, namely government organization and public order, was that for the first time the House had in a long time the luxury of dealing with bills in the Committee of the Whole. It seems that the Committee of the Whole was so attractive to hon. members that they left it only with reluctance and after a long period of debate. The activity in committees was substantial as well. Studies were conducted by the various committees of such matters as unemployment insurance, election expenses, security in the galleries, environmental pollution, the constitution, the broadcasting of Parliament, foreign policy, and the financial structure of the CNR.

I make these preliminary observations in order to remind the House that hon. members have laboured for a long period of time and, it seems to me, have laboured productively, painstakingly, and with considerable results.

It should also be mentioned that the House was recalled in September, which had not been according to original planning. It was felt that that month might be devoted to government planning and preparations for a future session. But in view of the desire of the government to complete and to provide additional time for consideration of the tax reform legislation, it was decided to recall the House in September. This ought to be kept in mind in considering the time provided for in the motion for the adjournment period.

Yesterday I was asked to go out in the corridor and reply to questions asked by newsmen as to the length of the adjournment period. I was asked why we had put on the notice paper a provision for a holiday of six weeks. Of course, I take exception to that description of what is involved in this motion. Hon. members know perfectly well that after this long period of activity, and at times very strenuous activity, and particularly strenuous in the last six weeks, it is reasonable for hon. members to be entitled, like other human beings, to take time off to recover their energies, their strength and their spirit.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: And I hope that, without apology, hon. members will take advantage of the time available for that very purpose. But that is not the only purpose. Hon. members are not only persons who must sit in the House of Commons in Ottawa. They are, in addition to that, representatives of the people of Canada. Each of us in this House is not a bureaucrat, is not someone who occupies a desk in Ottawa, but a person who is elected in a constituency, with electors who want to have some close contact with their members of Parliament.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: I know in my own case, Mr. Speaker, I feel somewhat exploited because I have been pinioned to this desk in this House of Commons for weeks and months, and have been able to go to my constituency only on week ends. I look forward to spending a part of this period working in my constituency, and renewing my knowledge of and association with the problems and the people of that distinguished riding of Cape Breton Highlands-Canso.

But in addition to that, the government will be commencing its program of meetings in mid-January, and it will continue its regular activities in committees of cabinet, and in cabinet itself, in preparation for the next session, in planning for the legislative program, in preparing the Speech from the Throne, and in examining the problems and the policies that are obviously the responsibility of government at the present time. Therefore, Your Honour, I feel that this motion, understood in the proper context, in the context as I have explained it, is reasonable and ought to commend itself to the House and to the people of Canada.

For my own part, before I sit down, I would like to thank the opposition House leaders, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin) for the great amount of time they have put into the work of this session of Parliament. Much of the work that was done, especially on the two bills that we have just completed, was invisible but it was work that required the co-operation of all parties in the House and that resulted in the completion of these bills on a reasonable schedule.

• (11:20 a.m.)

I thank hon. members also for seeing the Business of the House through until about seven o'clock this morning and coming back so fit and fresh and so numerous—especially on this side of the House.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that everyone in the House has enjoyed listening to and watching the gymnastics of the government House leader but it is clear that he just sprained his wrist by patting himself and the government on the back for the great job they claim to have done during the session.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hees: So that there will be no misunderstanding, government members will note that I said "claim" they have done. Actually, they have done a lousy job and we all know it. Let's have no fooling around about that.

In the self-congratulatory oration that we have just listened to, the government House leader claims that Parliament has put through a record amount of business. He seems to forget that just about two weeks ago this government claimed that because the opposition had held up the progress of the business for so many weeks, the government could not get ahead with anything so they had to impose closure. Mr. Speaker, they cannot have it both