

Supply

Mr. MacGuigan: However, I do know these comments represent widespread public opinion on the question and, as much as the right hon. gentleman opposite may pin his failing hopes on this soothing motion, I am afraid it will not be possible for him to use it to draw the wool over the eyes of the Canadian people as to the real motives behind his action.

Mr. Taylor: Remove your own leader before you start talking about ours.

• (1750)

Mr. MacGuigan: I do not think I have ever met a parliamentarian who was opposed to parliamentary reform. As this party's House leader said today, and I hope I quote him correctly:

[*Translation*]

That being said, Mr. Speaker, not only is parliamentary reform a necessity: it is also an urgency.

[*English*]

While I do not have the exact words of the leader of the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), I know that he too spoke of the urgency of parliamentary reform. There is no disagreement among members about this.

In the 14 years that I have been in the House I have seen the role of the private member enormously enhanced. We now have a role in committees which did not formerly exist. We have changed some of the procedures of the House, and improved the lot of members through the provision of more adequate staff and research assistance for the parties as well as adequate remuneration for members and improved conditions of service involving such petty details as the use of telephones. So in the 14 years that I have been here I have seen the role of the private member spectacularly enhanced. Not enough has been accomplished, however. While the lot of the member has been improved in many ways, we have not yet dealt with many of the most crucial questions involving his or her role. I have written extensively on this subject myself and I do not propose to repeat views which I have expressed elsewhere.

The debate so far has shown that members have many ideas about how reform could be accomplished. The House leader of this party suggested some changes which could be made immediately to improve the institution. That does not exclude, of course, the more far-reaching changes that we would all like to see take place.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that Canada has been privileged to have a democracy which stretches back to the birth of the country 115 years ago. Parliament has served many generations of Canadians with fairness, tolerance, and, I believe, a certain amount of wisdom.

Within these walls Canadians, regardless of their partisan differences, have been able to bring their beliefs forward to discuss them. Every side of an issue is relevant here and the rules permit and encourage full debate. For this reason I

regard the sorry events of the last two weeks as a grave breach of our traditions.

If it is parliamentary reform that the right hon. gentleman wants to effect, he will get a chance to air his views—as he has done today—and he will have the ear of every member of the House. But if his objectives are the darker ones implicit in the strangulation of the House in the last two weeks, then he will have perpetrated great harm on parliament and on our people.

The institution of Parliament is larger than all of us. It is more important than our careers. In the short time that we are privileged to be here as trustees and representatives of the Canadian people we must all remember that our first loyalty must be to Parliament and to the Canadian people.

It is in this spirit that we must approach parliamentary reform. Indeed, it is in this spirit that we must make parliament operate every day. That is the spirit of true parliamentary democracy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Taylor: Parliament didn't impose metric on the people.

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to take part in this debate. I feel particularly honoured because I believe that of all the parliamentarians who have spoken, I am the one with least experience in the House. I intend to dwell on that point to a certain extent.

When I came here I brought with me a great amount of awe and enthusiasm. To demonstrate how naive I was about parliamentary rules and traditions, I will tell you that the first time I heard the bells ring, I was so concerned about not doing the right thing that I stayed in my seat until they stopped and the vote was taken. I did not want to do anything that was out of order. I am sure other hon. members have had similar experiences when they were new. None of us are born with 20 or 30 years' experience. We just have to acquire it. I believe many new members have insights and objective judgments about the place that may escape those who have been here for a long time.

I should like to deal with the parliamentary process itself, Mr. Speaker. The reason for a parliament in the first place was that there would be a forum in which the expenditure of money could be scrutinized. Its purpose was to look after the public purse. That is why it was established initially. In England, when King John got out of hand, the noblemen of the day were very concerned. They summoned him to Runnymede and said, "King John, we are not prepared continually to give you money from our estates unless we have a say about how the money is spent." We are really involved in the same process today because our main responsibility to our constituents is to see to it that the tax money collected by the treasury is spent in a proper fashion. It is a very, very important function.

It is in that context that we need to examine some of the budgetary processes, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege to be a permanent member of a committee struck by my party which travelled for three weeks throughout the country, from coast to