

*Summer Recess*

session, during the first months of 1980? As a possible explanation, I suggested the fact that it may have been still under the shock of the election defeat. In appearance only, members opposite got a hold of themselves during the constitutional debate, but their approach was superficial. Then the peaceful climate was restored for a while and we were able to pass a number of bills. Finally, the most negative and destructive strategy, the childish and irresponsible bell-ringing incident which we all remember and which made it possible for the government to implement its national energy policy much faster than it could have done otherwise. But we could have managed without that incident, Mr. Speaker. It was an incident that I consider unfortunate and useless, the reaction of an undoubtedly frustrated party, and especially of an immature official opposition party.

Let us briefly go over the facts surrounding the bell-ringing incident and set them in their proper perspective. Hon. members will recall that the government had given notice and introduced an omnibus bill. It was not the first time that an omnibus bill had been introduced in the House. Even the Progressive Conservatives had introduced two omnibus bills in 1979 during their short stay in office, including one concerning Crown corporations with a schedule in which some 89 acts were amended. It was really a general issue that had to do with a substantial number of measures, and it was quite obvious that it was an omnibus bill. We came before the House with an energy bill that had many provisions. Mr. Speaker, never did the other House leaders make a single suggestion to me—and I ought to know—never did anyone from the Official Opposition approach me before the bell-ringing incident to negotiate how we might study the bill. But the Official Opposition opted for a different course of action—I was told to be honest, I am being honest and frank, and I challenge anyone to prove me wrong—the Official Opposition took a decision, and I refer to the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) who must be somewhere and who knows full well what happened: he rose on a point of order in an attempt to get a ruling from the Speaker of the House about splitting the bill. No luck. The bill was not split, so the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) moved the adjournment of the House, frustrated as he was by the decision of the Chair not to split the bill.

● (2050)

It is then that the bells began to ring and the Progressive Conservatives decided to let them ring. The government could not anticipate it. We did nothing to provoke that childish incident. As I said, it was no doubt an unpremeditated tactic because I would not dare say that the opposition acted in bad faith, it was an irresponsible and childish tactic that was used again on the spur of the moment to stall Parliament as the Official Opposition bogged down further in the mud which it was slinging onto the floor of the House of Commons.

The government, in the most parliamentary manner, without violating the basic principles of the House and Parliament, an

institution which we deeply respect, tried to stop that ridiculous ringing of the bells and exercise its right to legislate on energy, which we finally managed to do but unfortunately only after 16 days. However we should not forget that after those 16 days, Mr. Speaker, we concluded an agreement and initiated negotiations, after that ridiculous ringing had come to an end, having undertaken to divide the bill which we would have readily done if it had only been suggested to us. By dividing the bill we obtained a reasonable parliamentary schedule and a time limit for the passage of all bills resulting from the splitting of the omnibus bill.

Finally, on June 10 last, following the bell-ringing incident in mid-March, within less than three months, the government got its entire National Energy Program adopted, which is much more quickly than it took the only energy legislation, the bill on oil and gas that was passed the previous year after being considered, as we all know, for 12 months. We then realized that, from a practical point of view, the policy of the official opposition was hardly reasonable. It is a reaction that can no doubt be explained by the frustration to which I referred earlier but also by a lack of maturity, since in the final analysis the government got its National Energy Program through without agreeing to amendments, because once again the oppositor's position was superficial. They lacked substance, they did not say: The bells will stop if you make such and such a change. No, that was too profound, too intellectual for the people opposite. It was rather a superficial and technical filibustering. We do not like that bill, we want eight. Divide it into eight parts and we will give you what you want in three weeks or three months. Had we known in advance, we would have done it without letting the bells ring, but they wanted to give the public the impression that they were paralysing Parliament and the timing seemed right because we were in a recession and at such times, governments are unpopular. They abused the good faith of the public by trying to mix everything up and make believe Parliament could not operate due to the stupidity of the government. Everything went smoothly for the first week, Mr. Speaker, but they soon realized during the second week that public opinion would not tolerate an institution as important as the Canadian Parliament being abused in such a way. Accordingly, at the end of the second week, the Progressive Conservative Party had to give up on all points and allow this institution to resume its proceedings. Thus, the government finally obtained what it wanted much more quickly than expected but as the House Leader, I am sorry that the official opposition chose to rely on such a useless strategy under the circumstances. If only the opposition had raised the issue of the splitting up of the bill at the level of the House B.C. leaders before throwing that bomb on the floor of the House we would have surely come to an agreement and we would have, as in many other cases passed and calmly and constructively discussed a bill on the National Energy Program with hopefully a more serious and substantial contribution from the Official Opposition.