

*Forecast by Treasury Board*

● (1740)

**Mr. Baker:** You will go to confession, won't you, tomorrow?

**Mr. Blais:** If the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) who made that comment had cleanliness and was himself pure in respect of many of the things of which I accuse the opposition benches, I would kneel here and confess before this whole body.

**Mr. Baker:** We will suspend debate and allow you to do so.

**Mr. Blais:** But because I lead not only a very active but a very chaste and honest life, I would take up very little time of the House and I am afraid it would be boring fare indeed. Perhaps at this time I might simply wish hon. members opposite all the luck in the world in attempting to ameliorate the system. However, I suggest there are methods and means available to them should they use the wisdom God has given them and employ it in the proper way.

**Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) will take my advice to attend confession. I suppose that is his choice. Failing that, I suppose with regard to the last five minutes of his speech he could wash out his mouth with soap and that might satisfy most of us.

The hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier) has raised a very important matter, which the hon. member for Nipissing commented upon and referred to as delaying tactics in respect of the operations of our committees. I confess to hon. members of the House who have been here longer than me that my opportunity to observe the operations of the committees has not been as extensive as theirs. But if it is the purpose of committees to permit members of parliament to examine the estimates and get behind the estimates, then I think the committee system in this House is failing. The results of the failure are exhibited in the frustrations which must be apparent when one reads the record of many of the committees which examine estimates.

This morning we were considering estimates in the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates. There are matters which affect a particular body, namely, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, that transcend in importance—the enemies of this point of view might call this political—the issues in the estimates. Those, unfortunately, are the only times when dealing with estimates that members of parliament have an opportunity to speak to the bureaucrats—in the case of CMHC this morning—or the minister in order to examine an issue which is current. So I think members of the opposition can be forgiven, when they suspect something is wrong or have information that something is wrong, if they use that one occasion to get at the information.

So far as estimates are concerned, this parliament imposed closure in any event, and the hon. member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau) knows it. Even when the estimates are considered, as in the case of Supplementary Estimates A, those estimates will at least be reported automatically by the committee on December 10 no matter

[Mr. Blais.]

what parliament may do. That shows another aspect of the futility of the system. That is the only occasion—using the example of this morning—when members of parliament can examine an issue of the day. I am the first to admit that perhaps in dealing with estimates this might not be the best place to do it. Of course not. But it is the only place.

The next thing with which we might deal is the question period in this House of Commons when members of parliament ask for information. I suppose that if members opposite would remove from their hearts all their political prejudices, they would have to agree with me that the performance of the government in respect of the question period, so far as being candid is concerned, has been lamentable in the past few days. The deeper this government gets into trouble, the more meaningless the answers are to the questions put to it. We represent the public who want to receive answers to questions.

Another aspect of this question is the order paper. There have been discussions in this House about the slowness of the government in answering questions. It seems to me that questions are answered and information provided on the basis of what is politically embarrassing. If it is not politically embarrassing, then of course answers come forth in due course. But if it is politically embarrassing, the members of the opposition have to raise points of order to obtain answers. Lastly, I want to say that it may well be that members who support the government can go to caucus, or straight to ministers as colleagues, and within the secrecy of the caucus obtain the answers they want. That may be the situation, but I am not so sure it is with this government. But the opposition does not have that opportunity. I suppose the purpose behind the motion proposed by the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore is that the members of this House of Commons, who represent all the people of Canada, should be provided the same opportunity.

It seems to me that we are creating, because of the way in which this government has chosen to operate within the parliamentary system, an elite. The parliamentary system was never meant to be operated on the basis that only a few could use the instruments of power in their hands without at least accounting for their actions before the Parliament of Canada. This accounting can be done in many ways. It can be done all together by way of votes.

Another matter raised by the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore was that information is power. As the public service grows, as government involvement in the community and business and in other spheres of our country grows, so does the power of the government grow. If that is to be the way in which we are to proceed in this country and it is acceptable to the people of this country, then who am I to say that it is not right? On the other side of the equation, there should be a similar growth in the parliamentary body to examine, to scrutinize, to analyse and to submit to cross-examination members of the government who supply the background material from which that decision was made. I say this because the parliamentary equation is getting somewhat out of balance. If there is any evidence of that, it is the operation of the question period, the committee system as it relates to estimates—