

*Supply*

we are nobodies. We sit here and have to listen to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) making a statement on the Crow in Winnipeg while depriving our Members from western Canada of an opportunity to respond to his statement in the House of Commons where they are charged with the responsibility of doing so. We must sit here and watch the Prime Minister take pen in hand and write a letter to the *Toronto Star* to make an important statement on the Cruise.

The point was made that we could use one of our allotted days for a foreign affairs debate. I can merely repeat what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Nielsen) said. It used to be a well established convention of the House that there would be an annual debate in the House on external affairs under Government Orders. It was a two-day debate which took place every year without fail. We are now expected to give up one of our Opposition days in order to allow for a debate on foreign affairs which would presumably give the Prime Minister an opportunity—that is the logic in the intervention—which he never had to make his statement on the Cruise. I cannot follow that at all.

● (1240)

The Liberals are saying, why do we not give up one of our Opposition days? Why do we not designate one of our allotted days for a foreign affairs debate? Why should we? Our allotted days were given to us in exchange for giving up Committee of the Whole and allowing the estimates to go out of the House. The Opposition gave up a great deal in giving up supply in the House. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Liberal Opposition during the days of the Diefenbaker Government. That was a Government with 208 seats with a combined Opposition of 58 Members. If ever there was a Government with a mandate, it was the Diefenbaker Government. But that Government saw the Opposition of the day holding up supply and the estimates of the House for a period of 49 days. Parliament was held up to the point where it was necessary for the Government to go to the Governor General to get a Governor General's writ in order to meet the Public Service payroll and you, Mr. Speaker, remember it very well. It was one of those situations that brought about the reform that we now have whereby estimates are dealt with by committees of the House.

To give up the estimates, we had to be given something in return. What we were given were 24 allotted days. The Government is suggesting that if we want a debate on foreign affairs we use an allotted day. I would expect the Government would want to hear input once a year from the elected representatives of the people on foreign policy as well as allowing the process whereby it would have its own input through foreign policy debate. This should be a matter of Government business. It should be done on the Government's time; it should not be done using the time of the Opposition.

I believe we have to work together if that is possible, and I have grave doubts about that in this Parliament. I believe we have to try to restore this institution to a place where it will once again have some relevancy in the country. I repeat, we have to start somewhere. I suggest as firmly and sincerely as I can to the Government that the place to start is by having the

Government come into this place when the need arises to make statements and allow the Opposition Parties the opportunity, as provided for in the rules, to make a response. I firmly believe that if the President of the Privy Council were to come to the Opposition House Leaders of both Parties and tell them that the Prime Minister had an important statement to make that he wanted to make in the House, and that if they would give an undertaking to be brief in their responses and not get carried away with the question period, I am sure there would be agreement. We would want his statement made here in this Chamber where it should be made. But there has to be a start. There is the bottom line, and I hope the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure will deal with it.

One of the changes that should be made, and I say this as an Opposition Member, is to give up the question period on statements and get back to the system whereby statements were brief with no opportunity for questions except for the response of the Opposition Parties. If we get back to that process perhaps then the Government might look upon this place as being more relevant than the National Press theatre across the street or the scrum room downstairs.

I was interested in the remarks of the President of the Privy Council. I believe I did not hear him make any reference to the reform process now under way, although it might have escaped my attention because I had to leave the House for a few moments. Credit has to go to the Government for instigating that reform process in the form of the Special Committee of the House. We know why it started: it was a direct response to the ringing of the bells. But we have to ask ourselves, why did the bells ring? In my view the ringing of the bells was a symptom of the problem, a symptom of the disease that has caught hold of Parliament and is causing it to become irrelevant.

The mistake started in the first instance with the Government bringing forward an omnibus Bill on a major energy policy for this country. It had eight or nine different provisions, many of them unrelated. The Government came into this Chamber with an omnibus Bill, expecting the Opposition to buy it holus-bolus with time allocation. Once the Government did that it seems to me the responsibility was on the Chair and the Table, and I say this with respect, to treat seriously the arguments put forwarded by the Opposition to have that omnibus Bill split. If the decision had been made to split that Bill by the Chair, and there were ample precedents for it, and if the Chair had been given the correct advice—and I say that without any disrespect—then the bells would not have rung and we would not have had the problem.

This was the ultimate example in the practice of using omnibus Bills. I suspect that as a result of the ringing of the bells the Government will think twice before it brings forward another omnibus Bill similar to the national energy policy Bill.

We have a committee on procedure, a great committee. In the few moments I have left I want to speak about that committee. The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the