

*Division Bells Procedure*

shameful to use the bells to break your word and prevent an agreement, consecrated by a special Standing Order of the House, from being executed. The second appalling aspect of the attitude of the Progressive Conservative Party yesterday, when it let the division bells ring until 6 p.m., was that, in a democratic country, they were preventing the Government from introducing a Bill. What is more fundamental to our freedom? We have a Charter of Rights and a Constitution, we have established the importance of Parliament and the freedom of citizens to be elected members thereof and to pass laws, and one of the simplest ways of passing legislation in this country is to allow a democratically elected Government, to introduce a Bill, during the normal sitting hours. Granted, the Opposition may not agree with the substance, it may debate the Bill and there are rules governing debate. But by preventing Parliament from sitting simply to make it impossible for a democratically elected Government to introduce, not to adopt but to introduce a Bill, are they not running roughshod over democratic principles and insulting the Canadian people? I am saying that it is shameful and totally unacceptable, and I suggest that you, Mr. Speaker, are quite right to intervene at this time and urge all parties to seek ways of enabling the Chair to put a stop to the efforts of a political party bent on bringing Parliament to a standstill, ignoring democracy, flouting its contractual commitments and thus giving the people a pitiful example which ought not to be followed anywhere. That, Mr. Speaker, is the first instance of the Progressive Conservative Party resorting to bell-ringing tactics in recent days.

The second instance has to do with the incident which occurred at 5.40 p.m. the day before, or two days before, when Hon. Members had just voted on a time allocation motion to put an end to filibustering. A few minutes later, the question was put on an amendment. Hon. Members were still on Parliament Hill since they had just voted a few minutes earlier. The Progressive Conservatives knew that the Governor General or his representative was standing by in the Senate, waiting for Members before giving Royal Assent to a supply Bill. They knew that the messenger was at the door and that, in a show of respect for Her Majesty, we had to go to the other place for Royal Assent at six o'clock or shortly after. Despite all that, rather than let the vote be taken rapidly since Members were present, they decided to let the bells ring throughout the night until morning, after the beginning of the day, that is after the regular sitting hour. They openly admitted that they wanted to wrench compromises from the Government through blackmail, saying: If you do not make the concessions we want, Parliament will not sit today, Royal Assent notwithstanding. That was an unspeakable insult to the Senate and particularly to the Governor General or his representative.

Here again, it seems to me to be the kind of abuse we have been witnessing and which is so reprehensible that you are

seeking a remedy by appealing to Hon. Members. Here again, in a totally unacceptable and unwarranted tactical expedient, the Progressive Conservative Party completely ignored the Members who were quite prepared to vote and said: No, we are walking out, we will be back tomorrow. The bells will ring, forget about Royal Assent and we will even prevent the House from considering a Bill tomorrow unless you make certain concessions. That is quite unacceptable. That is blackmail, an act of sabotage against this institution, hijacking Parliament!

If we consider what has been happening in Manitoba, again it looks as though the provincial Conservatives took their cue from the federal Progressive Conservative Party which had let the bells ring for 16 days, an incident to which you referred in your remarks. The Conservative bells have been used to impinge on the rights of the Franco-Manitobans. Such an occurrence in Canada is completely unacceptable and shameful. The blue bells, the Conservative bells, the bells used to strike against Canadian freedoms are the bells which were used for the first time by the Progressive Conservative Party in this House two and a half or three years ago, when, for 16 days, before the whole world, news flashed that in the world's foremost freedom-loving country a parliamentary institution was paralyzed because some people on the Opposition side had decided that, to boost their own political interests, it was more relevant to prevent Parliament from operating than to allow democracy to prevail and a government to rule normally and let the people pass judgment on its accomplishments every four or five years as provided for in the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, those are the abuses which you wanted to help eradicate in presenting your comments this morning, and I congratulate you for it. You have been sitting for 25 years in this House as a parliamentarian and as a politician. I have only been here ten years. However, I am lucid enough to understand that you cannot build anything in our society by knocking down our democratic institutions, the first and most important being the Canadian Parliament.

As a parliamentarian and a Member of this House, I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that my role is not that of a helpless witness to such irresponsible and destructive acts, that my duty as a parliamentarian does not allow me to remain passive and silent. I have been House Leader of this Government for 4½ years and, for a number of years, I have witnessed actions which are absolutely repugnant to a parliamentarian. The comments you made this morning, Mr. Speaker, have given me an opportunity to say so publicly and to mention some rather recent examples of a behaviour which should certainly not be repeated if we want not just to protect this institution, but also to enhance the credibility of politicians in the eyes of the public.

I suggest that those who use such tactics not only should refrain from doing so, but should also apologize publicly and determine not to do so again. We are still in March; there is an Order of Business for today. We shall request the unanimous