

Private Members' Hour

now, we would not stop at all; we would just go on and on like the squirrel on a roundabout. We are still committed to several breaks a year because this is a country that pays attention to Christmas, Easter and a couple of other events.

It happened that just at noon today I had a chance of talking with that estimable servant of parliament, the Chief Electoral Officer. I asked when it would be possible for him to get for us who are democrats; and there are a few left—

An hon. Member: They are old democrats.

Mr. Fairweather: They are not necessarily the same thing. Anyway, I asked the Chief Electoral Officer to make arrangements—and I really wonder why we still fuss about this in 1976—to provide a list, on an annual basis, of those members of the armed forces who put down our respective constituencies as their place to vote. I was talking about democrats. Unfortunately, there are large numbers of people in the armed forces who are not democrats and who guard the list of their members and where their members exercise their electoral responsibility as if it were the key to security in this country.

● (1430)

We have a series of wonderful men and women serving Canada, and I not prepared to believe that the safety of this country is inhibited by the fact that the hon. member for Fundy-Royal knows that 200 of the 78,000 members of the armed forces have their location or their home voting place in my constituency. I said, "My dear Mr. Hamel, can you give me this list? I really resent sending somebody, every election, to appear before the returning officer to copy out laboriously by hand, the 200 or 300 names." He said, "That could easily be done, although the security of the state is involved, so the military people tell us. "He said," there is a private member's bill on the order paper somewhere, and if you could get that bill advanced, and if the committee were sitting, this could be done." I told him that with the timetable we have, and because of the length of the session, that might be pretty difficult to do, but that perhaps he could initiate a bill with the government through the responsible minister.

The reason I am on this track is that I wish to point out the dilemma in respect of this long session. The 40 days might have been very good to spend in the wilderness, although there were certain problems then, I understand from careful reading. But 40 days is a pretty difficult period for members of parliament to get their ideas through to the heads of the government. It might take more than 40 days, for instance, to get the government House Leader to agree with me that the reforms I propose are necessary. Perhaps it would not. Perhaps he would be prepared to initiate these things. I think it would involve a fairly fundamental commitment on the part of all of us.

I think this is a place that needs a few people who are prepared to go to the ramparts of parliamentary reform, and not just settle in in the committee in room 112-N. That is not the issue. The issue has to be made perceptible to the public. I think, fortunately for us—here I am perhaps being a little forthrighteous—most members of the public do not have a clue concerning what we are about, and that

[Mr. Fairweather.]

keeps us safe. There is a third bit of responsibility in this regard, because I see in the press gallery one in the employ of the great monopoly, the Canadian Press, who will send a message down to Wellington Street to announce to all of Canada what is going on here today.

An hon. Member: One man.

Mr. Fairweather: I wish him well, but it is even better when there is somebody else around. It must be very lonely for him.

An hon. Member: Now we have two.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Keep it up. We might get three.

Mr. Fairweather: Apparently the hordes are at our gates. Anyway, I have enjoyed this minute or two. However, I really would like, before the year is over, to see us come to grips with this matter to see whether there is some way in which the ideas of members of parliament can be sorted out and sent on to committees. Some of them, believe it or not, my dear government friends, are not bad in their concepts and the country would be better off if they were adopted.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister is seeking the floor at this time. In accordance with citation 166 of Beauchesne's, he would be using his right of reply, having moved the motion, and therefore would be closing the debate. I wish to inform hon. members of that.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have no desire to prolong this debate, but I should like to make two or three comments about the purpose of putting down this motion which seems to have been misrepresented, if not misunderstood. Second, I wish to make some further comments in support of what the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) has just said. The purpose of this motion is to restore certain private members' rights that had expired because of the length of this session.

I should like to say to all hon. members, particularly those in the New Democratic Party, that this is not put forward as a concession. This problem was recognized by the government some time ago. I made clear, at a meeting I had with the representatives of the parties, that I intended to introduce a motion for the purpose of restoring these private members' rights that had expired because of the length of the session. My hon. friend, now the House leader for the Conservative party, put forward a motion under Standing Order 43 with which I agreed. Indeed, it was a bit of conspiracy on our part that it might have been put through under a Standing Order 43 motion. Unfortunately, there were some replies of "No" and I took the responsibility of bringing the motion forward.