

*Supply*

thousand letters following the federal budget. The hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Lang) has publicly mentioned that he has received a thousand letters from constituents concerned about the budget. What is Parliament's role in the budgetary process? What opportunity do Members of Parliament have to correct policies that they believe are wrong or to give some direction and guidance to the government on policies which they feel will be helpful for their constituents or for their country in the future? How many of us can honestly say that we have been able to respond to calls from our constituents who have said, "I will lose my home. What will you do for me?" Have we been able to respond to those constituents who have said that if conditions continue the way they are today, their farms will be lost, or their businesses will have to close? How many of us can honestly say that we have been able to respond to our constituents by saying that we do have some function and that we will be able to do something to ameliorate the conditions which led them to have that concern about their future? I think that if we are honest, very few of us could actually make that claim.

Parliament has been like the gargoyles which we find on so many parts of the Parliament buildings, with very fierce expressions sometimes, frightening to look at, but in fact frozen in stone, incapable of really delivering on their facial threats. Parliament is fast becoming irrelevant. Unless we are prepared to take action now to restore Parliament to a position of prominence, I suggest that it shall become even more irrelevant in the future.

I mentioned earlier that when any of us studied political science, we learned that Parliament was supposed to be the centre of our democratic system. If we had the opportunity, I think it would be instructive to ask members of the executive, whether cabinet ministers or members of the public service, which would perhaps be even more informative, to draw an organization chart to describe their role within the whole of government. I think what we would probably find is that the public servant would draw a box with himself in it; above that would be the deputy minister and above that would be his minister. Beside would be the cabinet and on top of that would be the prime minister. Off to one side, like a malignant growth, would be Parliament. Parliament, far from being the central institution in our democratic system to so many in the government today, is viewed, in fact, as being an impediment and an obstacle, something which must be avoided or circumvented. Unless we are prepared to change that relationship, unless we are prepared to redraw the organization chart, unless we are prepared to restore to Parliament the responsibility and the power that is necessary to discharge our job on behalf of our constituents, I think we will find that this institution will slip further and further into irrelevancy.

Many suggestions for changes have been made over the course of the day which could help to make Parliament more relevant. The hon. member for London West made a series of them over the course of his remarks. My colleague, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) also made suggestions. People have suggested that we could reform the committee system and the budgetary system, and that the whole process needs to be opened up. Others have suggested that we

could have reform of the rules as they relate to the parliamentary schedule, or that speeches could be shorter or that we could perhaps reform the Senate. There is no end to the various proposals that one could make to improve the functioning of Parliament. Personally, I have made a series of proposals on behalf of the Standing Joint Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments. Our fourth report made a very comprehensive set of recommendations as to how we could improve the functioning of the committee system in Parliament. My own feeling is that probably the single most important parliamentary reform which could be made, but which is generally not considered in the context of parliamentary reform, would be to bring down a tough and comprehensive freedom of information act so that Members of Parliament and the people we represent would have the opportunity to know how decisions are made and how the public's money is spent. Today, that is denied us. A tough and comprehensive freedom of information act could help to redress that flaw in the system today.

Probably the most serious thing that could be done, the most profound development which could take place if we were serious about trying to reform and revitalize this institution, would not require a single change to the rules of Parliament. It would not require that we spend a great deal of money on more staff for ourselves, on better offices or improved telephones. It would not require that we pass new legislation. All that it would require would be a change of attitude in this institution. It would require that there be built a feeling of trust among parliamentarians. It would require that there be, on the part of the executive, a willingness to share power. It would require a recognition of the fact that all sides and all Canadians would gain if we could make this institution functional again and if we could take advantage of the tremendous expertise, the tremendous human resources available in this institution which are not being utilized today. I think that the party in power would find that its position would be improved if this institution were less fractious and less partisan and if we were able to build the same feeling of partnership as there was in the various task forces and as there is in the Standing Joint Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments. That would help the government. It would help Parliament as a whole. I think the government would find that its purposes would be furthered if legislation which passed the House were more properly and more fully scrutinized and if improvements were made which prevented problems arising further down the road. I know that the government would feel that its position had been furthered if its own backbenchers felt that they had an important role to play and that they would not be frustrated in trying to discharge their responsibilities for bringing leadership to the country and for serving their constituents. I would suggest that Canadians as a whole would be better served if this institution could help to pass better laws, could help to hold the bureaucracy to account more effectively, could help to scrutinize legislation that we had passed earlier, to ensure that