

*The Address—Mr. Baldwin*

happy to see that this question is contained in the speech. I should warn the government that there is more to parliamentary reform than merely arming the government with the guillotine to shut off debate and curtail discussion at their whim. Our rules and standing orders are not the property of this or any government or of any group or person. The right to set conditions under which the house operates is and must continue to remain the exclusive privilege, collectively, of the individual private members, without regard to political affiliation.

It is for all of us in our capacity as members to arrange these rules so that we may do our duty according to the oath which we took upon becoming members, which takes precedence over all other loyalties. After all, this is not a private debating club nor is it an institution which meekly to place the seal of approval on the proposals of the government. Many of us are here because our people sent us to find answers to some of the tough and complex problems which perplex us. If we cannot even come to grips with the necessary requirement of our own procedures to permit us to do this job, there is not much hope for the country.

Yet this does not have to mean that the writ of the government must run 100 per cent in every matter of detail and on all collateral issues. Surely, once the basic policies and fundamentals of spending and legislative proposals have been adopted and decided in the house along party lines, there should be opportunity for the private members from all parties to speak, act and vote on the details, particularly through the committees system, with a less rigid party system than is now the case.

● (4:40 p.m.)

I am glad to hear the Prime Minister suggest the likelihood of this on some of the issues proposed for the coming session. Certainly on capital punishment and divorce and certain proposed changes in the Criminal Code and on several other items, there should be declarations as soon as possible that on matters such as this, which to a greater extent than in other issues so deeply affect the individual conscience and beliefs of the members, there should be complete freedom, even though the measures may be introduced, as they should be, by the government.

I hope that we will come to this position in a great many more of the questions which we have to consider. It is my belief that the party system has substantial benefits, but it

can go hand in hand with more objectivity and independence on the part of the private members. As a matter of fact, I believe this objectivity and independence will strengthen the party system, certainly in the eye of the public.

We all belong to a party because we have great belief in the creed which it professes, and on the fundamental and philosophic problems there is an opportunity for parties to consider their positions and vote accordingly and to divide on such lines in the debates in the house on the basic programs. But there must be freedom of conscience and opportunity for the private member on the question of detail. Hand in hand with this we need to remove from the government the fear that every defeat need mean an election.

Procedures which will permit a more objective examination of bills and estimates before they have been poured into the mould of government enactments which harden and become inflexible must be worked out. For this to happen there will have to be a greater emphasis on quality rather than quantity.

Today when I hear the Prime Minister and other members of the government gloat and boast over the variety and number of the bills which they have enacted and intend to enact, I suggest to them that they restrain their enthusiasm until these bills have come back for amendment, change and modification in the light of the facts, because most of them contain substantial defects.

Governments—and this government in particular—have forgotten the cardinal principle of legislation, namely that the best bills and the best acts and legislation are those which conform to and follow the normal pattern of human behaviour, rather than run contrary and adverse to human nature. All too often in the last three or four years we have passed bills with too little regard for the capacity of the economy to absorb these measures or of the ability of the people to digest them, or even of the civil service to carry them out.

Without weakening government or diminishing leadership, it is plain that the elected members must assume a more useful and meaningful role in the machinery of democracy, and the frustration and weaknesses of the present system are not an environment in which freedom and independence can flourish.

All too often the decision a member has to make on a vote is a difficult and an agonizing one. This is particularly so for those who might harbour the reasonable idea that the