

Supply—Transport

does. I refer to the Prime Minister's appearance on a television show last evening when he said, among other things:

—I used to think before I had this responsibility that there was no comparison between the parliamentary and the congressional system; that it was so much better to have the executive right there on the floor of the legislature exposing itself to parliamentary criticism every day; so that if it didn't retain the confidence of the House of Commons, we had an election. I thought that was the good old British way of doing things and it was the right way of doing things. I used to be a little scornful of the Congressional system, where the executive were separated from the legislative side of government.

An hon. Member: He has changed his mind.

Mr. Diefenbaker: He then said:

They had four years and during that four years—I was going to say they could get away with anything. Now I think there is something to be said for a little more independence—I mean by that, the executive not being subjected every hour to parliamentary appearances.

That is a most unusual doctrine. Then he goes on to set out changes that should be made or should be considered in the cabinet system to increase the number of cabinet ministers but with a reduction in the number of ministers who would exercise an effective role in the processes of government.

What the Prime Minister said last night reveals a state of mind shown over and over again by his government in refusing to give to the house and the country full and complete answers. I would refer to the following question and the Prime Minister's answer:

You mean by that that you really haven't got time to sit back and think ahead of next week unless you really—

Mr. Pearson: We haven't got time to think, or as much time as we should have, and we haven't got time—because of the important, but time consuming, processes of parliamentary and democratic discussion—time to get before parliament, and to get parliamentary decisions on, all the matters that require action. This does not mean that we should scrap parliamentary processes, because in a democratic society there is no better way than discussion to arrive at decision.

Then he goes on to state that the United States system has advantages in that for four years or whatever the period is the executive can, to use the Prime Minister's words, "get away with anything". That is a doctrine that needs guide lines. I will suggest to the Prime Minister, that his thinking as evidenced by his remarks last night does not have that regard for parliament which those occupying the position of Prime Minister should have. I hope that is one of those loose statements made without having had time to think. It is

indicative of a trend on the part of this government made up of so many civil servants who think we in the opposition ought to be seen and not heard; that we ought to listen and not question.

● (4:10 p.m.)

The interpretation of what he said is that we should fix a regular period for parliament, that ministers should not be subject to examination and that examination is a wasteful proceeding. I say to the Minister of Transport that I feel sure, with his dedication to parliamentary traditions and procedure, there will be no agreement on his part with the views expressed by the Prime Minister to this nation last night.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, in view of the fact that the right hon. gentleman has in this discussion of the estimates of the Department of Transport put on record certain sentences that I undoubtedly said last night, perhaps he would let me put on record one sentence which he carefully omitted. That was, "It is going to be difficult to reconcile the two things"—by the "two things" I meant executive decision and parliamentary discussion—"because parliamentary discussion is still, rightly, a very important part of our political lives".

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Oh, yes, Mr. Chairman, a very important part. But the Prime Minister says it is such an important part that he feels we ought to give consideration to the adoption of the American system.

Mr. Pickersgill: He never said that.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have read every line of the Prime Minister's remarks. If the Prime Minister wants to table the whole thing I would be very glad if he would do so. However, I read every word of his explanation on page 2, every word from the beginning to the end. The Prime Minister has added, "It is going to be difficult to reconcile the two things because parliamentary discussion is still, rightly, a very important part of our political lives". It is not only a very important part but it is essential to the preservation of democracy and the maintenance of the parliamentary tradition. That is how important it is.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I shall make reference to that on another occasion. I know the Prime Minister has an appointment today, and I am