

*Summer Recess*

approved, particularly the significance of the legislation debated and approved by the members of this House.

However, what I find even more striking is not so much what we have done as the spirit that was evidenced during the debates that led to approval of these measures. To really understand what has happened, we have to put it in the right perspective. Hon. members will recall that this session began after two successive elections in less than a year and that, in April, 1980, at the very beginning of the session, we were left with a whole package of legislation, budgetary estimates that had not been approved in the two previous years and bills related to these budgets. In other words, we were left with an enormous financial burden. At the same time, with respect to the mental attitude or psychology of parliamentarians, the government had to face a frustrated opposition, embittered because of its defeat during the 1980 election.

● (2040)

I believe that it was only human for the official opposition to have a rather negative reaction, at least for the first few months, since they had been defeated after only nine months in power. It was only human that it allowed its frustration to influence its tactics or attitude and its style of opposition to government initiatives. What surprised me however, and I am still trying to understand this phenomenon fully, was that during the first few months, we approved over 30 bills before the summer of 1980, in about two and a half months. Therefore, at first glance, this frustration and bitterness did not seem to have affected the style and tactics of the Official Opposition. It was as though, and this seems to be the most plausible explanation, the Official Opposition were still under the shock or the impact of its defeat, were still reeling after this event which put it back in its place, namely on your left, Mr. Speaker, and this is perhaps why Parliament was able to pass about 30 bills very quickly during the first two or three months of the session. It was a bit later on that we noticed the true consequences of this defeat at the polls on the philosophy of the opposition, and this is unfortunate for Parliament, because while its tactics did not ultimately prevent Parliament from being very productive, they made the process rather painful and difficult, and offered, in my opinion, a rather unpleasant spectacle to the public who judge parliamentarians severely on both sides of the House and expect their representatives to have a much more serious and dignified attitude than has been the case until now.

As an example, let us take the state of mind or the spirit that was evidenced during the debate on the constitutional resolution. I admit this was an extremely important and controversial measure. If we make a chronological summary of this debate, Mr. Speaker, we see that it was the first major debate undertaken by Parliament two years ago, and it was to be expected that the opposition would react vigorously to our proposals, not because they were bad, quite the opposite, but because the opposition did not have its mind set on this type of

measure, did not have policies that could strengthen Canadian unity and was not particularly interested in the constitutional issue, patriation or a charter of rights. In other words, the Constitution was not a serious issue in the Progressive Conservative Party's program. As we know, the issue of national unity has never been of major concern to them, and this is probably why they are so used to sitting on your left, Mr. Speaker.

We introduced a very concrete proposal and expected a strong but constructive opposition. However, we were disappointed. What we got was more of an opposite to the process, a superficial opposition, an opposition on form rather than substance, because throughout the whole debate, the Progressive Conservative Party, the official opposition has never brought forth constructive proposals concerning the substance of our resolution, whether in relation to patriation or the Charter of rights itself. Instead, their proposals aimed at gaining more time, at postponing, and this gave other groups than the official opposition the opportunity to make a valid contribution to improve our resolution, and when I say others, I am thinking about the premiers and the Supreme Court of Canada. The Conservatives may say: "Yes, but our delaying action ultimately made it possible for the Supreme Court and the premiers to improve the resolution." Well, as far as I am concerned, that was sheer accident and the Official Opposition does not deserve any credit whatsoever, because it could not possibly predict that some improvement would be made and because the Official Opposition has always indeed refrained from proposing amendments or changes likely to improve the results of our constitutional endeavour and contribute directly to strengthening the country.

Mr. Speaker, what really happened in the constitutional fray is that, ultimately, the government got what it wanted. We now have a Canadian Constitution that was rejected by members of the Official Opposition. We have a Charter of Rights, we have enshrined the principle of the fight against regional disparities, we have a mechanism for the amending formula, and all that thanks to the initiative of this government and in spite of the superficial and impulsive opposition of the Progressive Conservative Party. Subsequently, we have had annual budgets with the related bills that came up for debate and, here again, everything went smoothly even though, in my opinion, we could have achieved the same results under more humane working conditions, with much less antiquated standing orders and in a more dignified manner for the people we represent here in Canada's Parliament.

The only other occasion when we witnessed that negative and destructive approach of the Official Opposition was quite recently, last spring in March, when we debated our national energy policy. There is the enigma, Mr. Speaker, the mystery which I mentioned earlier. Why is it that the Official Opposition did not react and co-operate at the beginning of the