

Supply

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the galleries are empty.

Let me refer to *Hansard* at page 4230 and House of Commons *Journals*, page 554, both dated December 20, 1968. Those records are public. Since the Opposition does not want the truth to be obvious today, let those interested people refer to that.

At the beginning of the Hon. Member's question he remarked that all we have to do is call an election. That is exactly the point I was making in my speech. Since this session began a little more than three years ago, the Opposition has kept exactly that in mind all the time. They were frustrated by their defeat after 37 days in the House and frustrated by the continued division within because of their leadership crisis. All they had in mind was to use Parliament to catch the Government by surprise and force an election.

That is why it is an insult today to see the interim Leader of the Opposition, who himself instigated the undermining of Parliament by ringing the bells for 16 days, come here today with a motion asking that we respect Parliament. The Opposition has been undermining Parliament. They have been stopping Parliament from working exactly for the reason indicated by the Conservative House Leader (Mr. Lewis) at the beginning of his question. He said "Call an election; that will solve the problem". That is wrong. That is bad for democracy and is bad for the proper functioning of Parliament. Under our Constitution, elections are due every four or five years. It was not a means of allowing Parliament to deal with the problems of Canadians.

Despite all this we were more than generous. We consulted Parliament at length on the Constitution. We consulted Parliament at length on energy. We consulted Parliament at length on the economy. The situation is now improving because we had respect for the institution and were able to assume our own responsibilities.

It is a shame that the Opposition today is very hypocritically saying that Parliament has been undermined. They have caused this problem and are responsible for it. Despite their attitudes, we are still making efforts to make this Parliament work and to support parliamentary reform.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do other Hon. Members want to ask questions?

[English]

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that this institution is in trouble. For any further proof of that one has only to listen to the debate today. But while I believe that the institution is in trouble, I also believe that it is the responsibility of all of us in this place to try to do something about it. We have lost confidence as an institution. Parliament has lost the confidence of the Canadian people. It has become irrelevant in the process of Government and has become irrelevant in the process of accountability.

While I do not want to enter into an unduly partisan exchange with the President of the Privy Council (Mr.

Pinard), I would ask him when he is making the case that the Government is not trying to undermine Parliament to explain to the House and the country why we never have a statement from a Minister in this House. Why are statements on important national issues no longer made in the House? Ministers now go across the street to the National Press theatre, downstairs to Room 130S or to other cities to have a press conference. They actually leave this place to go elsewhere to make a statement that should have been made to the elected representatives of the people in the House. That is Exhibit A to my argument and upon which I could rest my case.

I strongly believe that if the Government does not show that it has respect for, or confidence in, this institution, then that lack of confidence and respect will permeate throughout the entire land. That is the message which I will leave here. When the public see the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) writing a letter to the *Toronto Star* to give the Government's position on the Cruise missile, they would naturally ask why that statement was not made in the House of Commons since it is in session. The House of Commons is sitting and the elected representatives of the people are there. Its sessions are nationally televised and the national press is here. Why was that statement not made in the House of Commons under the provisions of the Standing Orders which make allowance for that type of situation?

Perhaps the reason we are not receiving statements in the House is that while Standing Order 18(4) permits the Government to make statements on major issues, it also allows Opposition Parties the opportunity to respond briefly and to question the Minister on the particular statement that he has made. I will admit that the latter part of that Standing Order is a new procedure. Previously, a Minister could make a statement in the House which had to be brief or the Speaker would intervene. Each Opposition Party was allowed to make a brief response to the statement. Our new procedure allows for questions, and perhaps therein lies the mistake. If we were to return to the old procedure through which the Prime Minister's or a Minister's statement with replies would last about a half hour, perhaps we would then have more statements in the House. I do not know but I want to give the Government the benefit of the doubt.

I say to the President of the Privy Council, the Government and its supporters that as long as the Prime Minister and Ministers make statements in a place other than here, whether at the National Press theatre, downstairs, outside in the foyer or in other parts of the country, it will, more than anything else, telegraph a message to the country that we are in fact irrelevant to the process.

I remember when the Prime Minister said in this place a few years ago: "You want to keep the House sitting because when you get 50 miles from here you are nobodies". I do not believe the Prime Minister was correct in that statement. The fact of the matter is that we are nobodies here and somebodies when we leave here. This is where we are irrelevant and this is where