

Supply

the unprecedented length of this session. I want to ask the Parliamentary Secretary now if in all honesty he can justify the failure to bring in a Speech from the Throne in view of the unprecedented changes that have taken place since the last one in 1980, changes that have changed fundamentally the conditions with which the Government has to grapple. I would like to hear him justify very concisely, if he can, what appears to Senator McIlraith to be an unforgivable breach of parliamentary custom and tradition going back to Confederation.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, if my Hon. friend is suggesting that it is not desirable that three-year sessions become the norm, I fully agree with him. I think that that would not be a good practice were it to be turned into convention.

I think there are in fact very extenuating and unusual circumstances as to why this session has gone on for so long. These circumstances include the Constitution deadlock, the ringing of the bells incident, and a lengthy debate with 70 or 80 speakers from the Official Opposition alone on the borrowing authority Bill and the Income Tax Act, Acts which, to keep our financial House in order, simply had to be passed. We could not afford to prorogue and then start a new session and be obliged under the orders to have a lengthy debate on the Throne Speech when we had to get those financial Bills through.

So yes, it should not become a practice, but yes, there were extenuating circumstances in this particular instance.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith) made much this morning and this afternoon of the Liberal Government keeping its promises and its commitments. I would like to deal with two such items.

First, I heard the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) during the election campaign say very clearly that the increase in the price of gasoline at the pumps would not be as high as he said the Tories would charge, namely, less than 18 cents a gallon. Well, the increase in the price of gasoline is not 18 cents a gallon. Most people in Canada would have welcomed an 18 cents a gallon increase today. It has increased well over 90 cents a gallon and more than that in federal taxes.

Second, I heard both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) during the election campaign say with reference to capital gains that V-day would be moved from December 31, 1971 to December 31, 1973 at least. The Minister has made similar statements since. That promise has not been kept either. The Speech from the Throne said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must call to the Hon. Member's attention the limit on question period. If he hopes to get a response, the time period has now expired for questions.

Mr. Taylor: I was just finishing off my question. That is why I was asking both questions at once. This is what it says: "All of these commitments will be kept, these pledges redeemed. the mandate fulfilled".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions and answers has expired. May we continue with unanimous consent? Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There appears to be.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, very briefly on the question of the price of gasoline, we can trot out figures and the other side can trot out figures and you can usually prove whatever you want to prove with statistics. I think in the final analysis whose figures you are going to believe really depends on trust. I happen to think that this side can point quite clearly to having negotiated the best possible deal with the Premier of Alberta. We heard so much about the Tories having a deal with the Premier of Alberta but we never heard the terms of it. If those terms existed, I would like to know what they were.

Mr. Taylor: Answer the question. What did Trudeau say?

Mr. Smith: Read the Halifax speech.

Mr. Taylor: I heard him myself. Pretty hollow.

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of interest to the reply to my question by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Smith). I was not surprised that he defined a sitting of the House as a day's sitting. The period in which the House would sit for one day would be defined in terms of parliamentary jargon or parliamentary language as a sitting. A session of the House would mean that period during which the House would sit for a year, commencing with a Speech from the Throne and closing with a short Speech from the Throne and prorogation or closing with dissolution resulting in a new election. That is traditional. It is basic to our concept of the Constitution as it applies to Parliament and I submit that it is rather important.

• (1520)

Mr. Philip Laundry, the distinguished parliamentary author who sits at our Table, defined the words "sittings of the House" in his book "Encyclopedia of Parliament", and he defined a session of the House in that same treatise. I commend it to all Hon. Members. However, notwithstanding the assurances of the Parliamentary Secretary, I have some problem because Section 20 of the British North America Act states as follows:

There shall be a Session of the Parliament of Canada once at least in every Year, so that Twelve Months shall not intervene between the last Sitting of the Parliament in one Session and its first sitting in the next Session.

That is the Constitution as it was. Now we have the Constitution as it is, the Canadian Constitution Act of 1981. We see that there has been a change in Section 5, one which was flagged in Committee by several Members on this side of the House including the Hon. Member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty). He expressed concern on behalf of this