

Speech from the Throne

[English]

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, as I understand the tradition of this country and of this parliament it is that when, on the very first day of a session of parliament, an address is given by His Excellency, the representative of the Crown, it is the first duty of the Commons to consider that address.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: Today, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), in what can only be considered as a publicity-seeking move—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: —has sought to interrupt what has been the tradition of this parliament since the very beginning. We have started a new session. What happened in the previous session is finished and over with. There has never been a request in any new session of parliament to have a question period before the address of His Excellency is considered by the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: The country has never been in such a mess before.

Mr. MacEachen: If the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre wishes to change the traditional form, if he wishes to alter the traditional courtesy that has been extended to the Crown by this House, then he ought to take the more direct method and move a motion at an appropriate time to send the whole question to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization for consideration. If he wants to dismantle the Speech from the Throne, if he wants to dismantle the address in reply, let him do it directly.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: This is the year to support the Crown.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not wish to dismantle the minister's speech, but I would invite hon. members to limit their contributions as much as possible to the procedural aspect of the matter. I am not suggesting that this has been done necessarily by the other members who have participated in this brief debate. However, for the guidance of the Chair I think it might be useful to limit our debate at this time to the procedural question of whether this amendment is in order. I think that the substance of the matter, whether there ought to be or ought not to be a question period, is the substance of the amendment that is under consideration at the present time.

• (1200)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I want to make one more comment. I think it ought to be underlined that never in the history of this country, never in the history of this parliament, has there been a request for a question period

before the opportunity for the House to proceed to the consideration of the Speech from the Throne, which is the message of the Crown to this House. That is new. That is an entirely new request. It has never been made in this House.

The motion that has been put by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is a form motion. It is not amendable. There is no way that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre can hope to amend this motion and ask the House at this point to vote on whether we should have a question period. Procedurally, it is absurd. It should not be considered. I am surprised. Maybe some day, probably a long time away, members of the opposition will sit on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baldwin: Very soon.

Mr. MacEachen: When that happens and when we come from the other place, after they have laboured for many days to produce a message that will be considered by the House, they will say: No, let us not do that; let us have a question period for 40 minutes. This is the idea they have supported today. What has happened to the party of Macdonald, Borden and Diefenbaker?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is taking its lead from the new republican, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre rising for the purpose of asking a question?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, before the minister resumes his seat I should like to ask him a question. The President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) said that our first duty out of courtesy to the Crown is to deal with the Speech from the Throne. May I ask him if he has forgotten the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has already introduced Bill C-1 to assert our right as a Commons to deal with our own matters first?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Edmonton West.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to indulge or engage in polemics or a diatribe with the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) who seems to be moved by some inspiration today that is rather contrary to that which should apply at this time.

I was going to raise the same point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I would simply add that the President of the Privy Council did make the allegation that it was traditional courtesy for