

Business of the House

Then on March 21 the hon. member for Laurier asked me when the government intended to make arrangements for the resumption of the debate on the private bill concerning capital punishment now before the house. There was some discussion regarding certain statements made outside the house by hon. members, and my reply that day, as will be found on page 2252, was:

At the present time the order paper contains a number of matters which require attention. When these matters have received consideration then, as the result of consultation among the house leader, the hon. gentleman and a representative of the C.C.F., a determination in this regard can be made.

While there were other references made on other occasions, I feel that those to which I have referred are sufficient to indicate a summary of the situation.

The interpretation given to the words I used in the house in connection with this matter was that a further day would be allowed or provided for. That being so, while there is much yet to be done, I feel the proper course to follow would be this. Consultation having taken place among the leader of the house, the hon. member for Laurier and the hon. member for Assiniboia, if a motion made later on in the session to provide a private members' day were accepted by the house, then an opportunity would be provided to deal with this and other matters that are appropriate to a private members' day. In other words, the undertaking given is being carried out. The house will have an opportunity on a private members' day later in the session, when we have removed from the order paper many of the things which require to be done, to discuss the bill of the hon. member for York-Scarborough.

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): We have reached June 14, and we began on January 14. The house has been in session now for five months and we have, on this five months' anniversary, received from the Prime Minister an indication of the work that remains to be done, including some important pieces of legislation which are not yet on the order paper. That is its own commentary on the manner in which the business of this house has been conducted.

May I mention first what the Prime Minister dealt with last. With regard to the private member's bill on capital punishment, the Prime Minister has indicated—and I have no quarrel whatever with the suggestion—that, if it is desired, a private members' day may be set aside on which this matter which has aroused so much interest in the country can be further discussed. I think

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

the expression used by the Prime Minister was so that it could, if possible, be dealt with.

I do not know whether the Prime Minister had in mind using the expression "dealt with" coming to a decision by a vote of the house on this matter. If so, I am sure the Prime Minister will agree, as he has already indicated, that that decision can only be reached—in my view at least—if all those hon. members who wish to speak on this matter have had the same opportunity to do so as has been given to those who have already spoken. Perhaps, therefore, it will not be possible in a day to come to a decision on this matter, and possibly during the recess—if we do not run into the next session of parliament—the government may desire to give consideration to what action, if any, the government itself should take in a subsequent session.

So far as the business of the house is concerned, the Prime Minister has pointed out that there are seven or eight important pieces of legislation yet to be introduced, including a bill of rights. There are also, as I calculate, ten or eleven pieces of legislation in various stages of progress in the house at the present time. If these matters are to be given the consideration they deserve—and so far as we on this side of the house are concerned we will do our best to see that they get that kind of consideration—it is obvious that a good many weeks will be required before they can be dealt with. I am not complaining about that, but I think we should be quite aware of the situation. Consideration of all these items, some of which will require careful and long consideration, will surely mean that we cannot possibly finish the business of this house before the end of July.

Quite apart from the legislation, the list of which I have before me, including two or three new items the Prime Minister mentioned this morning, we have various committees sitting. Indeed, seven committees are meeting today and I believe ten committees met yesterday. This afternoon when we will presumably be discussing one of the most important subjects any Canadian parliament could discuss, the amendment of our constitution, there will be three committees meeting which will make it impossible for some hon. members to participate in that discussion. There is one important committee that has not yet even been set up, the committee on broadcasting. The committee considering the Civil Service Act amendments will require time to give these matters the consideration to which they are entitled. It is obvious that the work of this committee will take some time. There will be witnesses to be heard in the discussion of the amendments to the