

Procedure and Organization

have got out of this position with dignity and grace. What happened? I have never heard a more arrogant speech than that made by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Saltsman: Even if we forget that this kind of response was designed to heat up tempers in the House of Commons rather than cool them, it was a disrespectful act for a member of parliament to make toward another who was offering him an opportunity to move forward with the business of the house. One could have forgiven the house leader had he said he was caught by surprise and this was the reason for responding as he did. He could have been forgiven had he said he had not prepared an answer. But he left the chamber and deliberately repeated this piece of arrogance to the entire nation. Surely there is no forgiveness for that kind of discourtesy.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

An hon. Member: He does not know any better.

Mr. Saltsman: The members of the government and those of the opposition are in this sense very much alone in this debate: men are on their way to the moon and public attention is focussed on that historical event. Many people outside the chamber cannot understand—and the press certainly has not helped them understand—the vital issues involved in this debate. They wonder frankly and honestly what all this is about. They ask: What are these two groups doing to each other? The public has not really made up its mind who is right and who is wrong in this regard.

It may take a while for people to make up their minds on this issue. Important as this debate may be, it will not strengthen people's confidence in the parliament of Canada. If we were debating the interest rate, if our debate built one more house in Canada, created one more job—

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Sold some wheat.

Mr. Saltsman: —helped one farmer, or sold some wheat, people would understand. It is difficult for people to understand this issue when grown men, the elected representatives on one side take one position and the elected representatives on the other side take another. We recognized this yesterday when we said to

the government: Let us sit down and talk about it. But we were rebuffed in a rude, crude, crass manner.

It is interesting to note that the whips are very happy these days. Normally the whips have a great deal of difficulty finding enough members to take part in a debate. There is difficulty because members have other commitments, they are in committees, have speeches to make and constituency work to do. Now the difficulty is that the whips have to placate all those who wish to speak on this subject; they have to find spots for those who are determined their voices shall be heard in the debate on an issue so vital to their future and the future of this institution.

It should have been recognized from the beginning, when the committee chairman brought in the report, that we were heading toward this difficult situation, particularly with a stubborn government on our hands. I cannot recall a committee report that did not have the endorsement of at least some members of the opposition. In this case it was not a committee report at all; it was a government report. There was no agreement on the committee. The flag debate was the most contentious issue that I can recall, but even in that case some opposition members endorsed the committee report which was put before the house. That is not the situation here. It has been obvious from the beginning of this debate that as much as we in the opposition have been prepared to give, the government has been prepared to give absolutely nothing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Saltsman: From the beginning the government has displayed a determination to have its own way. There has been no spirit of consultation, no spirit of compromise. When the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said, "We are masters of this house", the whole body politic was adversely affected. I like to recall the President of the Privy Council as he was before assuming his exalted position. We sat on committees together. I remember him as a reasonable, intelligent man who in those days understood the various positions being adopted. I like to think that when we have statements emanating from the President of the Privy Council he still has some reservations about them. I suspect that although it may be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

At one o'clock the house took recess.