

I have had the opportunity this year to get to know the hon. member for Bourassa since he was a member of the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs. I can say, without fear of giving him a swelled head, that he is a very sensible man. We both agreed after all on the report of the Finance Committee and on taxation.

He has showed he is a most sensible man and the only thing I could have against him is that he is a member of the party in power.

[English]

At the same time, I would like to offer my congratulations to the seconder of the motion for the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Douglas), whose constituency I have had some pleasure in visiting, not when he was the member but under other circumstances. It is a very pleasant part of the country. All I can say of both these hon. gentlemen is that their advocacy was polite and courteous, but I did not detect any scintilla of enthusiasm on their part for the speech that they were asking the House to support. They did not seem to have conviction, or heart. One has only to look at the list of the legislation that has been tabled—

Mr. Gibson: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): The hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Gibson) loves to sit back on that part of his anatomy which seems to give the greatest sound, because that is all we ever hear from him. Many of the items listed are more or less pedestrian, housekeeping items. There are pieces of tidying up legislation, and that is the fate of most Speeches from the Throne.

Then, there is another category of bills which last year made part of the grade, but for one reason or another they died on prorogation. After all, some of those bills deserved to die; they were bad. In so far as others are concerned, the legislative hurry caught them so they died in committee. Then, there were other bills that had been announced but never made it to first reading. There is the very famous and hardy veteran, the bill on the Canada Development Corporation. It may be that because it is now somewhere around No. 10 on the list it has better priority than the Prime Minister gave it last year when there were 75 items on the list and this one would have been the 76th. Presumably, it has been upgraded.

• (3:00 p.m.)

Then, there are some new matters. Some will meet with approval in principle without hesitation, although there may be some differences in detail. Some others will obviously be more controversial.

In the last group—and here is a point that I wish to draw to your attention, sir—there appear some innocuous items simply titled “taxation legislation”. We and the country are anticipating with a great deal of interest an early decision by the government regarding its tax proposals. I agreed with the issuing of a white paper on tax reform which allowed for a consultative process with the country, but that did not mean there had to be a

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rush to consider the matters included in the white paper. Certainly, in the beginning, we did not give any approval in any way whatsoever to the contents of that white paper. The government must bear the full responsibility for the uncertainty that has been created in the country arising out of the proposals in the white paper.

It is not just the responsibility of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) but the responsibility of the whole ministry under the Prime Minister that this country has been thrown into economic doldrums, in part caused by the uncertainty over the rather wild and irresponsible proposals in the white paper on tax changes. Whatever the government decision may be, you may rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that all tax legislation will receive very close scrutiny in this House and some of it may face very protracted and bitter opposition.

Then there is another bill, No. 38 on the list, called an act respecting the auditor general. I can promise you, Mr. Speaker, and members of the House, that if there is the slightest move on the part of the government to restrict the scope of the operations of the auditor general either directly or indirectly there will be fierce opposition. That office is responsible to Parliament. The government has nothing to do with it, either through Treasury Board control of its staff or as the result of any wish of the technocrats that occupy ministerial seats or their advisers. There should not be the slightest reduction of the freedom of the auditor general to comment on any or all matters that appear before him in the way of government expenditures.

Curbs have been imposed on Parliament before. We have a system of rules now that is a great gag, and I am surprised that some of the exponents of free speech in the House and some of those who allege to be the great exponents of our rules should have consented at any time to the curb imposed on Parliament by the last rule changes.

Mr. Gibson: So we go back to minority rule again.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Here is another emanation of the sound to which I referred earlier. In so far as the curbs on Parliament are concerned, we know what can be done to publicize government activity either on the floor of this House or in committee before the press who, apparently, do not attend committee meetings unless something highly sensational is likely to develop. The reports of the committees do not come out until weeks later.

Mr. Gibson: They do their best.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): As a member of the Committee on Procedure and Organization, I know that efforts are being made to improve the publication of committee reports. However, until that is done and becomes a realized success, the work of this House will suffer. It is an indirect curb on the right of examination by the House. The delay in the publication of committee reports as a result of certain difficulties is an indirect choking off or snuffing out of information.