

Supplementary Estimates (A)

We do not want the President of the Privy Council to give us a couple of little opposition days. What is the good of an opposition day in any event? What does it lead to? We do not want that. We want the President of the Privy Council, now representing a government with a strong majority, to give us something far better than that—to give us some rights. Grant us some rights. Let us enshrine some rights in the rules of the House.

I shall move an amendment to his motion later that is supremely reasonable and will carry out some of the items that we were going to carry out ourselves in the direction of parliamentary reform, so that on this side of the House we will not have to be begging like trained seals on our flippers to the President of the Privy Council, begging him for a couple of extra opposition days and so that we will have the right to have ministers come before the House with their estimates. I mean ministers who are recalcitrant, ministers who are arrogant, ministers who will not come to committees or who only come when they feel it fit to come to committees. These are ministers who do not want to answer questions in committees, ministers who have to have their minions on the backbenches on the government side protect them in committees, occupying time, as Mr. Speaker knows.

In these mighty committees that examine these estimates, everybody has ten minutes to question the minister. Lo and behold, the government has a majority on the committees and members of that government majority use up their ten minutes each footling around so that the minister will not have to answer any pertinent questions, any rude questions, any direct questions, and so that we will not have time to embarrass the minister or dig into some scandal or ferret out some information.

That is what happens in the committees—the majority wastes our time. The committees are absolutely useless for the discussion of estimates, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: We, with no power, with a minority, are in no position to demand anything. When these estimates go out to committees, forget it! We are going to learn nothing in those committees, unless accidentally along the way when we have some officials there who might give us a truthful and full answer and the minister is not around to stop them.

That is what these House of Commons committee studies of the estimates are. The worst thing that ever happened to the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, was when the estimates were taken away from this House and Committee of the Whole and sent to committees.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: So the minister gives us nothing. The minister gives us the square root of nothing. The minister gives us zero—zilch.

We have not agreed to the motion that he is proposing today, and we are not going to accept the motion he is

proposing here today; we have our own alternative. If he is a man who is going to listen to the Speech from the Throne, if he is going to rely on the good will of members, then I know that he is going to spread a goodly measure of good will in the chamber. He is going to listen to anything we propose that is reasonable and proper and that will help the members of this House.

When the good will of members is being discussed, Mr. Speaker, I cast my mind back to one week ago today and the good will that was demonstrated in the House when there was a mini budget or financial statement bootlegged into the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. I cast myself back there and look at all the good will that was generated on that Monday night, the fantastic good will that was displayed in this chamber.

The question of privilege that we raised has been found not to be privilege. I think the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) put his finger on the matter when he said that this is not a question of the technical rules of the House but a question of how the government wants to approach the House, of what kind of atmosphere they want to exhibit in the House. That is what it all is about. We have not seen too much good will yet. We are relying on the government for the good will. We are relying on the government to exhibit some of that good will.

The Speech from the Throne said that Canadians expect much from this Parliament. Canadians expected much from the last Parliament, Mr. Speaker, but they got precious little chance to see what the last Parliament could do. The last parliament met for only two months and then it was terminated. During those several months there was very little co-operation by the opposition with the then minority government; in fact, there was none.

We are willing to forget all that, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the President of the Privy Council that, for my own part, I should like to get through all the legislation that is non-controversial, and there is a lot of that. I do not see any reason why there should be long debates. We will deal with it speedily and efficiently so long as we get co-operation on this side of the House.

Where we want that co-operation, Mr. Speaker, is in dealing with these estimates, but not dealing with them out in committees of the House where they get no publicity, where we have not got the weapons, where the minister can deal with us as a toy. We can ask the minister a question, he can take nine and a half minutes to answer it and so the ten minutes is up.

When one gets the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) before the committee and asks a question about blended oil pricing, he speaks for nine or nine and a half minutes. By then his time is up and he smiles as he finishes his peroration. He has not answered the question, has not given one bit of information and never intended to. Then we pass on to the next questioner. A Liberal backbencher tells him how good he is, what a wonderful job he is doing. He asks penetrating questions such as, "Mr. Minister, do you realize how good you are?"