

scheduled. That will secure the benefits which the agreement provides.

It is encouraging to me to note that in statements to the press senators on both sides of this chamber have indicated their intention to deal with this historic business with dispatch.

Later, as the Governor General indicated, there will be another Speech from the Throne, at which time the government will set forth its agenda for the days ahead. It is then that we might anticipate legislation dealing with child care and broadcasting and with new initiatives for Parliament's consideration. It was here that Her Excellency spoke of the renewal which is the essence of Canadian democracy. For "real, live senators" renewal is an invigorating challenge.

Honourable senators, it is well that we dwell on the bright promise a new session brings to these precincts. The mood of optimism is heightened, too, by the fact that we are together again on the eve of the holiday season when differences of outlook and persuasion are dimmed by the sharing of traditions, beliefs and hopes.

Yet it is impossible to ponder our own good fortune without acknowledging that all pleasure is clouded by the great tragedy which has befallen the people of Armenia. Last week's earthquake was one of the greatest disasters of our history. It is almost impossible for us to conceive of loss of life on such a scale or damage to property so extensive.

From all parts of this cynical world of ours aid is pouring in to the crushed and rubble cities—Spitak, Leninakan, Kirovakan and Stepanavan—places that most of us had scarcely heard of a week ago. Our government has committed \$550,000 in relief and has promised \$5 million more. Mr. Clark has offered expertise in clearing the ruins left by the quake. Help from Canadian organizations and individuals has been swift and generous.

But how little it seems to those who give. Whatever, it goes with prayers for rescue and recovery and with understanding of the special grief of Armenian Canadians.

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

On motion of Senator Gigantès, debate adjourned.

#### PRIVILEGE

**Hon. H.A. Olson:** Honourable senators, I should like to raise a question of privilege. My question of privilege has to do with the action that has been taken by the members of this chamber, in an unusual sitting—in that the Senate met at ten o'clock this morning—to do away with the sittings for the rest of the week, and the main reason for my rising is that this action also washes out all of the Question Periods for this week.

Honourable senators know full well that we have not had a chance to get at the government for over three months to ask questions that we have an obligation to ask and that the government has an obligation to answer. I wanted to raise a number of questions about the rescue team that is being held up at Mirabel Airport in Quebec, which has been trying to get

over to Armenia to be of assistance. It is comprised of trained people from western Canada who have carried out this sort of operation before, and the government did not give them the kind of clearance they needed in order to be part of that rescue operation, which the whole world realizes is so desperately needed. I wanted to raise questions about Canada's failure to respond to the speech made by Chairman Gorbachev at the U.N. a few days ago. I wanted to raise questions about the GATT meeting and the absolute failure of Canada to do anything positive respecting the agricultural problems that were brought up there.

● (1040)

I know what happens. You ask a question and the Leader of the Government, who is responsible for giving or obtaining the answer, takes the question as notice, and sometimes you get an answer a few days later. Anyway, he has an obligation to carry such questions to the ministers who are responsible and to come back with answers. Now that is not going to happen.

I say to you, honourable senators, that it is an irresponsible act on the part of this chamber to meet for one short Question Period and then adjourn for a week, when we have all those matters in which the Canadian people are interested, in which they are desperately interested in some cases, and now we do not even have a chance to get at the government.

**Senator Flynn:** You have a chance now!

**Senator Olson:** I understand that, but when you were sitting on this side of the house you had an obligation to ask the questions; and we accepted our obligation when we sat over there to provide answers to them. That does not happen anymore, and I am getting fed up with the way this government responds to its public responsibility.

**Senator Flynn:** That is not a question of privilege!

**Senator Olson:** It is a question of privilege—

**Senator Flynn:** No!

**Senator Olson:** —because we are changing the rules of this house. Normally, we meet at two o'clock. I had an appointment at the hospital at ten o'clock this morning so, after you changed the hour of sitting, I was unable to be here.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Oh, oh!

**Senator Olson:** I don't like it, and it is wrong in my view. I know my colleagues agreed to sitting at 10 a.m.—I was not at that meeting either—but I object to the Senate's abdicating its responsibility to provide an opportunity for members of the opposition to ask questions and to oblige the Leader of the Government to seek answers to them.

I know that you are going to go through the process. You have leave to adjourn a little later until next Tuesday, but I give notice now that there is not going to be unanimous consent any more for this chamber to abdicate its responsibility and adjourn so that we wash out Question Periods.

**Senator Flynn:** We had one when you were not here!