

Handling of House Business

He went further still, stating that the opposition should not study legislative proposals with such care, but should do its best to have them adopted as quickly as possible; in short that the opposition should be content to speak without saying anything.

Mr. Speaker, that is really too much. The present government is looking for a scapegoat because of its failure. It is looking for excuses for its lack of success and, by attacking dishonestly and insidiously the members of the opposition, it is achieving two definite goals. And that is serious and it is for that basic reason that I am in agreement with the other House leaders.

First, the government blames the opposition for its own failure so that the Canadian people will forget what goes on here.

Then, it tries to subdue Parliament, as that is the ultimate result it wants to achieve under the pretext of efficiency, and says so itself.

Mr. Speaker, as regards efficiency, one may recall a long debate which took place in the House. The government has devised a new type of bill: the omnibus bill, the package deal, in which dozens of proposals are included. And always for the sake of efficiency, the opposition is requested to adopt the whole bill in one shot.

Well, the opposition's role is precisely to keep an eye on legislation and to co-operate with the government in defending the interests of the Canadian people.

Mr. Speaker, if, sometimes, it may seem to the Prime Minister that the passing of legislations is delayed in the House, this is in direct consequence of the attitude of the government regarding Standing Orders, of its way of operating at the parliamentary level, which puts the opposition in an impossible situation.

If, furthermore, Parliament cannot be protected by Standing Orders after having been placed in an impossible situation as was said by the other House leaders, then, Parliament is downgraded. It loses its meaning, and the role of the member of Parliament is minimized to such an extent that he becomes a mere number, an individual who draws his pay cheque at the end of the month.

Mr. Speaker, we have an important role to play in this House and if the Prime Minister is irked by certain delays, he is to blame for that situation which compels us sometimes not to delay consideration of a bill, but to study it thoroughly, because it is too complex.

By his irresponsible statements which probably he does not mean really, the Prime Minister tramples down—this is serious and this is why we are protesting today—the essential and vital role of the opposition in every parliamentary system and especially in ours. In doing so, he finds an excuse to increase his control on the supreme institution of Parliament. He wilfully attempts to depreciate the Canadian parliamentary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, we are convinced that the present Prime Minister sets us back twenty years at the parliamentary level. That is the most serious matter and the basis of my

[Mr. Fortin.]

question of privilege. The Prime Minister is undertaking a drive to run down the Canadian Parliament. This is a much too serious matter to let it go without protest.

I conclude now by endorsing the comments of the hon. members for Winnipeg North Centre and Peace River (Messrs. Knowles and Baldwin). The Prime Minister may think that Parliament is at his service, but he is wrong. The Canadian government is serving all Canadians without exception and I would like to point something before resuming my seat: the opposition is the conscience of the government. The Prime Minister's statements, unfortunate and big with consequences, indicate that he would like to be rid of his conscience but we shall not be overcome. We are here to defend the Canadian population, in spite of the Prime Minister!

[English]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I have little inclination to deal with the accusations which have just been made. I would say though, if it lightens your task, that I stand by the substance of everything I have been reported as having said.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I say that I stand by the substance because there may be some points of detail which would bear correction. I think it would be easier for you, Sir, to judge whether I did hold Parliament in contempt if you knew the circumstances in which this exchange took place.

When I left the House of Commons I was asked to meet a group of students from the province of Quebec, and I gladly did so. I think it is fair to say that I was met at the outset with a slight amount of hostility.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: As soon as I began to talk about our parliamentary system I was met with laughs of derision, Mr. Speaker, by people who apparently do not hold this institution in very high regard. The first question they asked me had to do with the use of the question period. They could not get over how stupid the opposition was—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: —in its use of the question period. My answer to them was a defence of the institution. It was to indicate that even though the question period may not have been used all that successfully in their presence, it was an extraordinarily important institution because every day it permitted the opposition in the name of the country to question the government about its acts and sometimes to discover injustices or disorders in governmental conduct. The whole tenor of my exchange with them was one of defending this institution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I do not mind admitting that I agreed with them that the opposition was not using the period