

speaking members saw no point in speaking because they were not understood. A change came about in that regard.

When I first came here, at the beginning of a session a first meeting would be called, in one room, of the 20 or 25 committees for the purpose of electing the chairmen of these various committees. I remember that one day at that mass meeting I asked if there was a quorum present of the particular committee of which I was a member and for which a chairman was being named. I was told by the government whip of that day that it always had been done in this manner and that the chairmen were elected in this way. I was put in my place.

Most of the committees did not hold meetings. I would say there were a good dozen committees that would go through a whole parliament without meeting, or meeting perhaps only once, such as the Committee on Printing to agree not to print certain documents, and the Committee on the Restaurant to approve raising the price of meals in the dining room from 50 cents to 75 cents, or something like that.

There is now far more participation by individual members of all parties than was the case when I first came here. I say this with some regret because in those days we, as members of a small party, were the prima donnas and we produced the action. Now there are prima donnas in all parties; there is the electronic system and everybody gets in. There is, as I said, more participation by private members, and this is good.

I think there is a good deal of merit to what the last speaker said about the question of respect for parliament today. I also agree. I think one reason is that we do not make the best use of our time. We spend the same amount of time on unimportant as on important issues.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I hope we will adopt a system—I may put it in as precise terms as I see it—whereby we decide every session that there are three categories of bills, routine and quite unimportant things, things that have a reasonable measure of importance, and then the crucial ones.

In respect of the routine housekeeping measures let us not spend any time on them at all, but ship them to the committees.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): As for the medium group I suggest we should have an agreement that there would be a certain number of hours for debate on any one of those bills.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My next suggestion should receive applause from this side of the House. I say that the opposition should have the right in every parliament to say that there are five or six bills which we regard as crucial, and that these must be before the House without a time limit. The result is that we would spend most of the available days on five or six crucial bills, but let the routine and medium class bills be

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dealt with in a routine way. I think then we would have sharper debate and would increase the respect held by this country for parliament.

I feel the same way about estimates, the study of which is another major function around here. I think the way we spread ourselves over the whole gambit of billions of dollars, and do not do a very good job on any, is wrong. I would rather see us handle half a dozen departments a year so that we would do the whole job in the course of a four-year parliament. I would also like to see us bring back to the floor—I realize what the member said about the value of doing things in committee—three or four departments a year at the choice of the opposition—and I think an element of surprise would have a salutary effect—so that when we study the estimates we would do a really thorough job.

● (1750)

I have lots of other ideas, but that is enough time for me to take today. I agree completely with my friend, the hon. member for Rocky Mountain, that we do not want a master prime minister; we want parliament to be supreme. I agree with the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River that the way to do that is to look at our procedures and try to strengthen them. I believe we can do so, and I hope we can get at this very soon.

Mr. D. M. Collenette (York East): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to participate in the debate today, but having listened to the motion put by the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Clark), to the comments of my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Reid), and those of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), I felt compelled to make some comments and, like the hon. member who spoke before me, I shall not take too long.

It is always very difficult for a new member, especially a young member, to follow someone such as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre who has so much under his belt, so to speak, in parliamentary experience. I think that most of my observations will be on a purely academic level since I was a student only a few years ago.

The basic argument that we have before us in the motion of the hon. member for Rocky Mountain is that we should achieve some balance between historical growth, the evolution of society, the government and the role of the executive, and the accountability of the parliamentary system.

Let us consider first how our system developed. We must remember that the role of prime minister started originally back in the Middle Ages when kings used to rule England and they chose two or three advisers. After a while, as various kings decided to attack other countries to expand their domain, they found they needed more advisers. They had to build up their own administrative system. Later in the Middle Ages we saw a growth in the court around the king. Then the king started to choose one principal adviser. Gradually, that person gained preeminence. At the same time the administrative or support staff of the king gained in influence, while the power of the kind started to decline.