

Supply

Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) said that perhaps he was participating as one of the youngest and newest members of the House. I find it almost remarkable that I am likely the most veteran member to have participated in this debate, knowing that time is starting to move on and there will not be that many more hon. members who will be able to participate tonight.

However, once we get away from this particular period, and when we let the columnists and the commentators dissect the last 16 days when we all heard that clang of the bell, I am suggesting to Your Honour that Canadians away from this place will put different interpretations on why that bell rang for so long. I would venture to say that my friends on the government side were surprised as were we, frankly, on this side that the bell rang for so long. I will not go into all the reasons why it might have been possible to shorten the bell. However, I can tell Your Honour that in terms of the area that I know best, my own riding, and Atlantic Canada to a point, many people phoned me who had never phoned a politician before. Certainly, in the first week, that was so. Admittedly, during the second week, the people who phoned were more partisan. The good Tories were phoning to give support, as well as people who took a position as good Liberals, if one can find them, and there are still some around.

Mr. Kempling: Name one.

Mr. Nowlan: They phoned and, of course, they were against the bell. However, these were the committed people after that first week or ten days. I seriously believe that unless this House reforms itself, people will say in the not too distant future that that bell was ringing for this institution. It is almost that serious. One can look around tonight. I am not casting stones because it is the opposition motion. There is not a great, horrendous throng behind me tonight to support whatever I might say or what the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) had said earlier today when he made a very reasoned contribution to this debate. However, I am telling Your Honour that I have been on a procedure and organization committee. I was a member of the last one that sat, goodness knows how many years ago. It is almost an absolute scandal in terms of priority of reform in this institution. This is the three hundred and eighth day of this first session of the Thirty-second Parliament. This session of Parliament started on April 14, 1980. It will likely be known not only as the Parliament of the clang, but also long known as the long session. Perhaps there will be other, more derisive terms than that. I will not comment. I will take a lead from my good colleague, the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton. This afternoon his strongest word was "regret" at the President of the Privy Council's (Mr. Pinard) contribution to this debate, when he took on, as also the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) took on, the personal attributes or the personal motives of my leader. I am not going to get into that other than to say this, that my leader is not one to take a back seat to anybody on parliamentary reform. I say that, especially when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) or the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), the two of them, cannot agree on what is a separatist or a terrorist, or on defining the

Prime Minister's most memorable statement last week when he was implying here that this is fascism and that there were reds in the opposition, led by their leader.

• (2040)

I am not going to say anything more than that, but the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that this is a government which has said in the Speech from the Throne that it was interested in reform, yet we have gone into 200 days of sitting and we have gone into a second year and we have not even structured the procedural organization committee. That is an insult to all members of this House.

This is a very funny thing, and I do not know if there is a conspiracy somewhere. I am going to surprise some members now by saying that the Prime Minister in another utterance some years ago stated that the Members of Parliament on both sides were nobodies. He was speaking from a debating point of view and he was speaking as a supporter of that claim, and I could be also a supporter of the theory. In terms of policy we all know this. Members have said this here today. We do not really have that much input into policy. The whole history and purpose of this institution was not to legislate but to try to control the power of the purse.

I am afraid, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister does not appreciate that from me, a backbencher—and someone, I think it was the member for Gloucester (Mr. Breau), said that he was referring only to the opposition members, but I am referring both to the opposition and to those on the government side.

I can tell you that if I felt like a nobody in the opposition as a backbencher, I really lived as a nobody when I was a backbencher on the government side, in my own party, in terms of real input in policy.

My point is that I am afraid that the Prime Minister does not understand in his dissection of the problem in his very theoretical logic, that that is not a solution to that problem.

If I am a member, elected by my constituents, and I am a nobody, if members of the opposition are nobodies, then I am going to extend this to the backbenchers on the government benches, and if I do not think they are really nobodies, then that will be a reflection on the people who sent us here, and then these people are nobodies. Mr. Speaker, that is the very thing that we came to try to correct in this institution, that it is slowly dying.

We have a funny paradox here. We have the lights of television on this institution, and some of us were here in the House before television lights penetrated to this institution. And, Mr. Speaker, you were one of those members here when I was here earlier, and I would say, speaking in marginal terms, even though some were nobodies, there was still some input before the fundamental rules changes were made in 1969. At that time, I as a backbencher could stand up and when, for example, the then minister of the environment had his estimates on the floor of the House, I could at least address