

Procedure and Organization

men must accept unreasonable measures. And this is one measure our party will refuse to accept with all the strength in its power. Never before, in the few years I have been an hon. member of this chamber, have I witnessed anything approaching the travesty that the President of the Privy Council indicates he is about to perform.

In the 700 year history of parliaments, the free and honourable parliaments were those in which the government at all times was responsible to parliament. Today, the teachings of 700 years of history are to be reversed. No longer will the government be responsible to parliament; it seems that parliament now will be responsible to the government. This is something no free people can accept.

Mr. Basford: Let us be responsible to the people.

Mr. Stanfield: Right. The minister has said the right thing.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Exactly. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) says we must be responsible to the people. He is absolutely right, and I hope he contributes to this debate.

Mr. Bell: Let the minister stand up. Let us hear from him.

Mr. Stanfield: And it has taken the government six months to appoint a commission.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, the minister made his contribution from a sitting position, which he no doubt thought was appropriate. His suggestion is that parliament must be effective, and that is quite true. But what the minister, the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues are asking for is not an effective parliament; they want an emasculated parliament. Although this issue has not been in the nation's headlines in the last few weeks, it is nevertheless vitally important and is not a matter of housekeeping, as some would have our people believe. Basically the issue is, will our people continue to enjoy responsible government. That is possible only when you have a free and responsible parliament.

● (8:10 p.m.)

One could spend a great deal of time thinking of the utter inconsistency of the government's position. We have made many worthwhile changes in the last year to make this

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

parliament relevant to this country and to this age. One worth-while change was the establishment of Your Honour's position as Speaker with the most complete kind of independence a Speaker has ever enjoyed in a Canadian parliament. I think it was a mark of great advance that all parties, and all party leaders agreed some months ago, in order that parliament would be free and all members could be responsible, that Your Honour's position would be given an even greater place of freedom from any kind of political pressure or control.

It was agreed by all parties, including the Liberal Party, that Your Honour should occupy that special role. We were told this would make parliament more effective and responsible because Your Honour's office and the rules Your Honour administers are the prerogatives, not of any one party or group, but of all members of this house. Suddenly, the government, by its action today, has indicated that they believe the rules are their prerogative to do with as they please.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): This is something no member should be asked to accept. It has been said by the government house leader and others on that side that we must protect the rights of the majority. I have always had occasion to smile when people have suggested to me that we must be concerned about the rights of the majority. I have heard this phrase not only during this debate on rules, but also in connection with the debate on the official languages bill.

Some people have suggested the provisions contained in that legislation were going to endanger the position of the English speaking people of this country and the rights of the majority would somehow be downgraded. It was quite noticeable in that instance that no government member ever expressed that concern, and rightly so. I am still looking for an example which would indicate how the rights of the majority have been endangered. If we want to talk about an effective legislature in a free country where democracy is still operative, we do not look in the first instance to see how effectively the rights of the majority are being protected but we look at the rights of the minority.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): What we have seen today in this house has been a flagrant disregard for these rights. It is not a question,