

I also want to suggest that when a Party House Leader makes an alternative proposal to the other House Leaders, it is worthy of at least the courtesy of a reply, which, by the way, our House Leader has yet to receive to a letter which was written something over two weeks ago to the Government House Leader on Bill C-155. Whether they like, dislike or are willing to discuss the alternate proposal, they should have done it.

I do not want the Progressive Conservative Party to become all that holy on a matter of bypassing Parliament. I have done a little research since I received notice of the motion yesterday. For example, on September 6, 1917, the Robert Borden Government of the day took over the Canadian Northern Railway by Order in Council and there was no statement on motions and there were no announcements of any legislation, so there is nothing unusual about this matter. It goes back a long time in the Canadian Parliament. It does not go back a long time in the British House. Therefore, the practice here has been endemic for decades. In fact, it not only took over the railroad, but it also appointed a board of directors. By Order in Council, it appointed a board and amalgamated Canadian Northern Railway with other Government-owned railroads. It was not until almost three years later that it brought in legislation which formally announced Government policy about the Canadian Northern Railway. If one wanted to do some more research, one could come up with countless instances of the Conservative Party in the House when it was governing doing just as well as one could expect from the Liberal Party. Therefore, it is a case of the pot calling the kettle black, and they both need a thorough cleaning.

Parliament must be primary. It must be first. Anything a Member of the Government wants to do should be said here, first, before anywhere else. If he wants to hold a press conference an hour later or go out and speak at a public meeting and issue written statements, that is fair ball. I think the same applies to Members of the Opposition.

Frankly, considering the way all of us turn out press releases here, most of which are not covered, and if they are covered, most of them are at the back with the hemorrhoid ads in the fourth or fifth section of the paper. When I think of the amount of time we spend doing that, when we save that material for presentation in Parliament as and when the opportunity permits, we should make the gallery do its own work for a change instead of MPs and Cabinet Ministers having their staffs writing the copy. I would like to see how good some writers would be if they had to sit down and write out their own stuff.

However, the main point of the motion is that through habit, through the efforts to obtain political advantage, through reasons of secrecy, most of which are totally devoid of any kind of reason or validity, Governments in the Parliament of Canada have made deliberate or other kinds of efforts to detract from Parliament, to govern by public relations exercises. They have tried to manipulate the media which, in turn and as a result, would deliberately or inadvertently end up trying to manipulate public opinion. The media should obtain

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its coverage from what occurs in Parliament and obtain further follow-up coverage as a result of what occurs in Parliament. Would Governments use advertising agencies, press conferences, consultants who divulge reports before Parliament knows about them or has an opportunity to ask about them? Surely that is some kind of denigration of the parliamentary process.

I think that there is an onus, first, on the Government, because it is the one which initiates. Except for Private Members' Hour and the odd motion by unanimous consent, only the Government can initiate. However, there is also a responsibility on Hon. Members in the Opposition Parties to conduct themselves in the same manner, through notice to Ministers, presenting a Bill for first reading, making a speech in the House in debate, which does not go out to anyone else until one has started making a speech. Therefore, there is a responsibility on both sides to make this place function in somewhat the tradition of the British House, although it cannot be exactly the same.

The subject of the Estimates was mentioned by the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen). We all know that that is a total exercise in futility. Committees are not provided with the expertise to really go into what is behind those numbers and those man-years. One can move to remove an Estimate by a certain amount or reduce it to a dollar, and that might be fun and games in the committee. It would be interesting to see what would happen if a Government Member felt free to reduce an Estimate because of an item that he thought to be inappropriate, and one which some Opposition Members thought to be appropriate. Estimates would be dealt with in a much more neutral and effective manner.

I believe it was the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) who used the word "neutral". Around here, neutral is like trying to be half pregnant. There ain't no such thing.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): At the moment.

Mr. Benjamin: There ain't such a thing, and there hasn't been since I came here in 1968.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): We always hope for improvement.

● (1730)

Mr. Benjamin: I suggest the question concerns neutrality versus accommodation. I would rather use the word accommodation because it would be totally in error to expect any person in this place to be completely human and neutral on any subject raised here. A Member might try to have a balance of bias, but he will not be able to be neutral. Therefore, I suggest that the word "accommodation" is more suitable.

There are rare occasions in Parliament when one or more of the Opposition Parties will go to extraordinary lengths to take what appear to be obstructionist measures such as filibustering. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) made a very appropriate remark earlier today