

people of Canada do want this government to tackle tasks which are of longer duration than perhaps one or two sessions.

I think it is fair to say that before election day most of the pundits were predicting another minority government. They were writing that, in the midst of anguish and global uncertainty, in a country which very exceptionally gives majority mandates because of the vast cultural and geographic distances which separate us, most predictions were not for a majority government. If the Canadian people, in their collective wisdom, gave one party a majority, I think it is the duty of the leader of that party to try to express some of the larger tasks, some of the unfinished business which could not be properly handled or tackled in parliaments of shorter duration.

It is comforting to me that in his remarks the Leader of the Opposition touched upon several of those larger subjects. He mentioned several of the items of unfinished business which we will attempt to settle in this parliament. It is comforting because the very fact that the opposition has pinpointed them as important gives us on this side great hope that, though we may differ in specific methods of tackling some of those problems, at least our goal will be largely the same, that all the unfinished business which lies before us will be finished, hopefully, by the end of this parliament.

● (1610)

[Translation]

The first matter I should like to deal with is that of a major parliamentary reform. Mr. Speaker, it is essential to the survival of democracy and freedom in this country that Parliament remain at the core of this nation. It is therefore necessary for this institution to be able to express the collective will effectively and completely. Far be it from me to equate effectiveness with a certain type of chain production. I should not like the hon. members on this side to think that we wish to increase the powers of the government at the expense of those of the opposition.

On the contrary, we are perfectly aware that a major parliamentary reform is only possible if all hon. members, regardless of party affiliation, are in favour of this reform. The government House leader has already told me that he is heartened by the spirit of co-operation he has found in all members and other House leaders. I do not want to labour the point, but I think it is important to realize that when we compare the Canadian House of Commons with provincial legislative assemblies, we are oftentimes outrun by them because of their ability to pass bills that are generally good much faster than we do. Considering the list of bills introduced in the House last Monday, Mr. Speaker, it is easy to realize that we are again with this good old practice of carrying bills unadopted because of time during one session to the next session or Parliament.

In most departments, I am sure lots of reforms pile up that would be for the advantage of Canadians if only both Houses had time to process those bills. For sure, people looking from the outside get the impression of a Parliament somewhat paralyzed by outdated procedures and antiquated traditions, and of a Parliament that will itself become inefficient and out-of-date if it is satisfied with giving the impression of efficiency instead of realizing it.

The Address—Mr. Trudeau

The leader of the House, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp), and myself have discussed many of these things together and I am sure that during this Parliament, and I hope during the first session, there will be a wish on all sides to introduce many of these reforms and I mention a few of them: The first one should certainly be the more rational use of our time, and I do not mean reducing the length of the discussions when we are studying substantial questions, but by reducing it when we are concerned with purely technical questions or minor amendments; when there is a general understanding, we should be able to put our legislation through much faster and not find ourselves having to put off from one session to another bills that should be adopted in a much shorter period of time.

A second subject which, to my way of thinking, deserves more of our attention is that of the time we give to the second reading of bills. When a bill comes back for second reading, according to tradition and the rules, we are supposed to discuss mainly the principle of the bill.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that a reasonably united and coherent party should be able to give a general opinion for this party on a bill in one, two or three speeches. This should be done in one or two days but unfortunately we often see that second reading lasts for weeks and even months.

This is a reform that our colleagues in Westminster Parliament have adopted some time ago and I for one am somewhat scandalized by the fact that every time we have discussed imitating this practise there are people, especially on the other side of the House, who are ready, if I may quote Montesquieu: to cough and spit like Englishmen but who never want to adopt what good there is in English institutions—

The third subject is a touchy one and pertains to the remarks made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition; it is a subject I would like to say a word about and it is that of the oral question period.

The Leader of the Opposition asked, demanded, rightly so, that the government give better and more appropriate answers to questions put to it.

Mr. Speaker, here also I suggest that the oral questions period become a really serious and productive one, in which the government will do its best to answer questions properly, that it does so following agreements—perhaps following an amendment to the Standing Orders or practices—agreements that would enable the government to know in advance, as it is the usage in the Westminster Parliament, the questions put to it. If questions are asked for technical reasons or to gain debating points, one should not be surprised to see the government reply likewise. But if, indeed, the opposition parties want to obtain proper and precise answers, it seems to me that they could not object too strongly to their giving us notice and allowing us a few days to get the information.

● (1620)

An hon. Member: As it is done for the questions put on the order paper.

Mr. Trudeau: Again, as it is done in the place called the mother of Parliaments, Great Britain. The hon. member