

Business of the House

Traditionally the procedure would have been for me to reply and then for the other leaders to speak. We had intended to ask the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson) to take part in the debate immediately after that, and make a statement about the present international situation as he views it. We had also expected that at an early time the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) might make a statement enlarging on what is set forth in the speech from the throne about defence preparations, and that there would also be an opportunity at an early day for a member of the government to make a statement about economic controls that may have to be contemplated. There would be an opportunity for those three subjects to be discussed in appropriate sequence in the debate on the address.

To my knowledge we have not followed the practice of the parliament at Westminster of setting aside a day for debating any particular subject. Without the introduction of a special motion or resolution, I should be at some loss to find an appropriate standing order under which these subjects might become debatable matters. On the other hand, in the debate on the speech from the throne all three can be fully considered, because they are all referred to therein. My understanding is that the adoption of the address at the parliament of Westminster is regarded almost as a formality and takes place practically without debate.

If it were the desire of the house to adopt the address at once, we could immediately move to set up the committee of supply. I would not want to give a formal opinion, but I would imagine that there might be an opportunity then for debating these three subjects in proper sequence. But I must confess that I have not had any opportunity of considering this matter with my colleagues. I trusted, and still trust, that it might be convenient to follow the traditional order. If the various leaders made their speeches on the address tomorrow I would undertake that the Secretary of State for External Affairs would follow on Friday with as complete a statement of the situation, as he views it, as it is within his province to make, and that very soon after that the Minister of National Defence would be prepared to enlarge upon the statements about defence preparations contained in the speech from the throne.

Of course it might make for dispatch if we adopted the speech from the throne right away and found another appropriate method to deal with the other matters, but I would not like to ask hon. members to forgo their right to discuss matters of public concern which they think it is necessary to

bring before parliament in its opening days, unless that seemed to be almost the unanimous feeling of the house. If we followed the procedure suggested yesterday I would hope that we would get before the house, beginning on Friday with external affairs and perhaps following on Monday with national defence, full statements from the ministers concerned with respect to the policies of the government announced in such general terms in the speech from the throne.

Mr. Drew: Since the Prime Minister has indicated that he has received such short notice of this matter, and since admittedly this procedure has not been adopted before, for the purpose of seeking further consideration I should like to make a point with respect to what he has said. If we adopted the procedure followed at Westminster of naming a day for discussion of these major subjects, consideration of the speech from the throne could then proceed with all members possessed of the information essential to effective debate. If the usual course is followed it is obvious that those members who have already spoken will not then be able to take part in any such debate as might be arranged to deal with a particular subject. In the government and in the other parties there are certain members who deal particularly with certain subjects and they might lose the opportunity to deal with those particular subjects.

This matter can stand, but I would again urge consideration of the subject by the Prime Minister. As he has already pointed out, the speech from the throne is in very general terms, and I suggest that the very general terms in which we received the information make it extremely difficult at this time to discuss three of the most vital subjects which this house will be called upon to deal with, or in fact that it has ever been called upon to deal with. I am not suggesting this as a practice always to be followed in the future. I am not suggesting it as a practice that would in any way limit the opportunity of any member to deal with those subjects that arise in the debate on the speech from the throne. I am suggesting, however, that we are in a most unusual and critical period and that it would be extremely helpful, from the point of view of orderly debate and the attainment of that approximation to unanimity with regard to those matters on which we can agree, which will certainly be forthcoming, to have the essential information on these vital subjects before we proceed with the general debate.

I leave that suggestion with the Prime Minister. If it commends itself to him and his colleagues we can follow another course tomorrow. In view of the fact that the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson) is here, I should think that the house