

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

Mr. Churchill: For the simple reason that the Leader of the Opposition and the leaders of the other parties sitting together agreed that the Christmas recess would run until January 21.

Mr. Pearson: It was your responsibility. Who is running the house?

Mr. Churchill: I should like to consider now the question of interim supply. Interim supply has loomed very largely in the mind of the house recently, and I think the Leader of the Opposition threatened us today—did he not?—with regard to the next interim supply.

Mr. Pearson: Oh, no.

Mr. Churchill: "Wait till Wednesday", he said, "when interim supply is likely to be called, and then you're for it".

Mr. Pearson: Who said that?

An hon. Member: The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Churchill: The history of interim supply is simply this. In every session which starts, say, in January or February, interim supply is granted for the month of April, for the month of May, for the month of June, and sometimes running into July. It is granted month by month until the main estimates are past the house. There is nothing unusual about that. That is done and has been done year after year since parliament first met. Normally, 99 per cent of the time, interim supply is passed in about 30 minutes because it is just a grant of money to pay wages and salaries to keep things going until the main estimates can be considered. In an election year, it is a little different. In an election year when the house stands adjourned for two months it has been customary to grant interim supply for a much longer period.

If you want to look at the record and understand the operation of interim supply in the course of an election year, it is a very easy thing to do. I can give you the record of interim supply for four years in which elections were held. In the year 1945 the house assembled in the spring. An election was held in June and the house reassembled in the fall. The same was done in 1949 with an election in June. In 1957 there was an election in June and in 1962 there was an election in June. If you look at the way in which the estimates were handled in those four calendar years you will find that parliament passed interim supply for a nine month period in 1945 before the main estimates were dealt with. In 1945 the opposition was a responsible opposition; it was the Conservative party. In December of that year they dealt with the estimates in co-operation with

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

the government very quickly and passed them in a very short time. In fact, in the last six days of December that year they passed most of the estimates, but they sat long hours late at night past midnight and early in the morning. In 1949 interim supply was granted for eight months. Again there was a responsible opposition, the Conservative party, and that responsible opposition, co-operating with the government of the day, passed the main estimates in the last few days of the session in the fall of that year. They took 15 days to pass the estimates.

I suggest to you that that situation should have prevailed in the year 1962. There was a spring session, then an election in June, and then a fall session. A responsible opposition would have co-operated with the government and passed the main estimates in the fall of 1962.

Mr. Pearson: There was only one supply motion.

Mr. Churchill: But they would not do it. They obstructed and they refused.

Mr. Pearson: Why did you not bring them in?

Mr. Churchill: I have just told you that we brought in six departments in the fall, and not one single item of those departments has yet passed this house. Had there been a responsible opposition—

Mr. Douglas: May I ask the minister how often the departments were called?

An hon. Member: Once.

Mr. Churchill: I am glad the hon. member is interested in this subject. Those six departments were called after the first supply motion.

Mr. Pearson: Once.

Mr. Churchill: The Department of Agriculture was before us for three days. That discussion took place. I mentioned earlier that the estimates would have been up for consideration again except for the fact that the opposition devoted six whole days to interim supply just prior to Christmas, something which could have been passed in 30 minutes.

There is a responsibility resting on all parties in this house. The leader of the Social Credit party mentioned that matter in his address prior to the supper hour. He said there was a responsibility to get the business done. He said there was a responsibility to the people of Canada not to indulge in political by-play but to deal with the business. That responsibility lies largely with the opposition. All the government can do is this. It indicates