

National Parks Act

on second reading and with those who will consider this bill clause by clause in the committee shortly.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, until the conclusion of the question period I had no idea of rising, even though I had some strong objections to the contents of this bill. What caused me to decide to speak is the fact that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien), as soon as his bill was called, could have won any competition in Olympic racing as he ran out of the House so that he would not be here to listen to the discussion of matter of paramount importance in relation to the preservation of our parks.

Mr. Honey: On a question of privilege—

Mr. Diefenbaker: This kind of interruption—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The parliamentary secretary is rising on a question of privilege.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What is the privilege?

Mr. Honey: I will tell my right hon. friend the question of privilege. The minister and the government have given me the responsibility in this House of Commons—

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is no excuse.

Mr. Honey: Perhaps the hon. member would allow me to finish. Whether he agrees or not, the responsibility has been given to me. The right hon. gentleman is a champion of the rights of Parliament and is always critical of those who would move to a congressional system. This is an opportunity in Parliament for private members to participate. As the right hon. gentleman knows, I have the authority of the minister and the government to pilot this bill through. The minister is watching the proceedings very carefully and reads *Hansard*.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

● (4:10 p.m.)

Mr. Diefenbaker: Farthest from my thoughts is it that he will not make a "honey" of a job of it, but the fact remains that ministers should be here. That is what they are for. We have more ministers in the present government—30 in number—than any government has ever had, and fewer ministers stay in the House. First, a selective system was started, and now they have a system whereby ministers take leave of their responsibilities with chronic abandon.

I am in entire agreement that the parliamentary system should be preserved but, sir, what we are witnessing is a total disregard of Parliament. Minister after minister leaves the House, refuses to answer questions, determines for himself the rights of Parliament. If this had only happened once, one could have excused it.

On February 4 the following matter was raised by the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt). Incidentally, I want to point out that the minister was advised that I was going to speak about his conduct as I never speak about anyone in a critical manner unless that person realizes that I am going to speak about him. This is what the hon. member said:

Possibly there is an excuse for the minister's absence this afternoon. We are told that all day tomorrow as well, the minister will be gallivanting, or perhaps attending to important business, out west visiting Indian reservations. There is just no excuse for this. It is the minister's duty to be in the House when measures as important as this are presented. No one would object or complain about his absence. What we are complaining about is the fact that when this major piece of legislation is presented he is not here.

I seldom speak except on matters that I feel affect the prerogatives of this institution. I have never in 30 years seen Parliament treated with the egregious contempt that is being shown to Parliament by the present administration. There is a complete disregard of this institution. Indeed only the other day the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) said that these are the kinds of things that bring about the republican system of government. What we are facing is the degradation of this chamber. Debate no longer continues as it did over the years, nor does exchange of opinions and differences, with the minister listening to the suggestions made and then acting, if he decides that they are worthy of consideration, to make possible amendments.

I dislike comparing Parliament today to what some have compared it, but under the present Prime Minister Parliament has been compared to a cemetery operated by its own occupants. That is a direct allegation that this institution is being bypassed.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Deachman) made a suggestion for the creation of a marine park which is worthy of consideration. He did it in a most exemplary way, but toward the end of his remarks he said he hoped that when this bill found its way into committee the committee would be able to listen to witnesses and make recommendations. Sir, the committee system which