

*Supply*

the language, the exchanges in the House, and attacks on the Chair by innuendo. Surely, Sir, that has to change.

**Mr. Tobin:** Both sides?

**Mr. McGrath:** Yes, I have no hesitation in saying both sides. However, with all of the good will in the world in bringing in changes to the rules of this House, under a Government which was in my view magnanimous in what it was prepared to give up, those changes will not work unless there is a concomitant change of attitude on the part of all of us as Members. Without that change, without due regard for the responsibilities we have as Members of this place, then I am afraid we will just go from crisis to crisis on the floor of the House and the business of the nation will be swept to one side.

Important issues have been neglected this past week or 10 days as a consequence of the House being consumed by this issue. I do not mean this in any way critical of the Opposition, but under our rules the Opposition sets the agenda for Question Period. In doing so, due regard must be made for the other great issues of the day. After all, Question Period is the principal vehicle of accountability for us as parliamentarians, at least until we can develop a committee system which will take some of the issues away from Question Period and thereby make that a very important vehicle for accountability.

This is not a happy day for us. It is never a pleasant experience when any Member of this place is forced through circumstances to submit his or her resignation from the Cabinet. I commend those Members who made reference to the very dignified and responsible manner in which the former Minister conducted himself when he came to this place at eleven o'clock this morning to announce his resignation.

I hope, Sir, that we will give the new system a fair try. In doing so, I hope we as Members of Parliament will always conduct ourselves in such a way as to not bring embarrassment to the people of Canada, but bring honour on ourselves as Members of Parliament.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Questions or comments?

**Mr. Tobin:** Mr. Speaker, I was very interested to hear the Hon. Member participate in this debate. I believe he has earned the right to have Members pause and listen carefully when he speaks. That is so because of his work as chairman of the committee on reform and for the report he presented along with other members of the committee from all Parties. He is also entitled to that because of the work he has done following the presentation of the report to promote reform in this House.

Having said that, I reject the notion that no work has been done in the House over the last two weeks. I would not want the public to have that impression. We passed four Bills this past week, Bills C-96, C-107, C-108 and C-109. We have begun work on the Income Tax Act. House committees have continued to work. I think the public watching should understand that, while it is true media coverage, public comment

and Question Period have been consumed with this issue, the work of the House has not stopped, and neither has the work of the legislative committees which resulted from the reform package, or the work of the standing committees with their new regulations which resulted from the reform package. None of that has stopped. The Member is right to be concerned that the spirit of reform, to the extent to which it exists among various players on all sides of the House, not be victim of the acrimony which grows out of this kind of conflictual matter.

• (1530)

I want to remind the Member that there was a time when this House was hijacked for two weeks. It was not consumed with a single issue, but hijacked. The bells were rung for two weeks. At that time no Bills were passed and no committees met. The bells rang for two weeks. Although it is not relevant, it was that side of the House that rang the bells. The public should bear that in mind.

Does the Member not agree that the basic premise for the function and operation of any Government has to be, not only the notion that the Government is honest and above board, but the perception that it is honest and above board? Would he not agree that the overwhelming media and public preoccupation with this issue over the last two weeks might have been avoided if we had in place in this environment a means to investigate immediately and cause to come to conclusion serious allegations of wrong-doing, rather than having as the only weapon open to the Opposition, the continued harassment of the Government and demands that something be done?

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Speaker, I naturally want to respond to the rather extended comments made by the Member. The 10-minute period is given to the House for short comments and questions, but I will respond to his remarks.

In the course of his comments he interpreted what I said out of context. I was saying that the Opposition sets the agenda of the principal vehicle of accountability which we have in this House, that being Question Period. Question Period is the only chance we have in this House to deal with the issues as they develop, questions which used to be defined as "matters of urgent and of national importance" which cannot be dealt with in the ordinary manner in which we deal with legislation. That is precisely what I was saying.

The fact is that the work of the House continues beyond Question Period. That is one of the problems we have, because the only thing which is widely reported upon is the 45 minutes taken up by Question Period. I hope that that will be corrected. I hope that the House will soon be seized with a House order to allow the media to go into the standing committees of the House where a lot of the real work is done. I hope that as a consequence of cameras being allowed into the standing committees of the House decorum in the standing committees will improve.