

*Supply*

made to stop the ringing of the bells is very simple. I paid a tribute a while ago to the parliamentary spirit shown by the Liberals during the past two weeks. And the way we succeeded in stopping the bells and solving that problem was strictly consistent with parliamentary rules. We referred to a Standing Order which enables us to set allotted days and this gives us a six-day period to negotiate how we could consider Bill C-94 on energy security. Well, such agreement is quite simple. We have not departed from any parliamentary principle as far as we are concerned, because the negotiations on the energy bill only began after the vote on the Tory motion, when the bells stopped ringing. This was sacred for us. We could not be forced to negotiate on Bill C-94 while the bells were ringing and we were asked to pay a ransom.

• (1610)

The principle was safeguarded, Mr. Speaker, because the negotiations began after the vote on the Tory motion yesterday. The second principle which was safeguarded was the right of the government to set, as you know, the order of business under Standing Order 18(2). If we had agreed to introduce some other government bill instead of the energy bill, then we would have created a dangerous precedent, because each time the opposition would like to alter a bill or would be displeased with the contents of a bill, it would only have to blackmail the government saying: "Change the orders of the day or otherwise we will be filibustering. We will let the bells ring 15 days as we have just done for the energy bill and we will raise ridiculous points of order or questions of privilege, as we have done during the debate on the Constitution to cripple Parliament."

One will readily understand that we could not give in on that point. We did not either. So, finally, a compromise was reached: the government agreed to negotiate the form, the manner in which the energy bill would be debated, but to do so only once the bell had ceased to ring, that is, after the vote on the Conservative motion, once the knife was no longer held to our throats, and to negotiate during a maximum period of almost six days, which could be considered adequate time for the parties to come to an agreement on how to divide the bill, and also negotiate a reasonable calendar for the completion of the study of all parts of the bill as divided.

So, essentially, the compromise is twofold: first, the bill will be divided; that guarantee is on the table, provided, second, there is also on the table the guarantee that a reasonable parliamentary timetable will be respected. That is understood. I feel chances are excellent that an agreement can be reached well before next Monday. Negotiations are now under way and they will continue; but I think it is also very important, in the context of this debate, that I should make clear the nature of the agreement reached yesterday because it is imperative that parliamentary supremacy be safeguarded, that negotiations not be pursued while the government, so to speak, has a knife pointed at its throat, and that the right and obligation for the

government to decide what the order of the day will be should be upheld. Those principles were safeguarded. At the same time, the solution is parliamentary because, just as it has always been with parliaments worthy of the name, problems are solved by negotiation. We have about six days to negotiate the form of the debate on the bill which, as you will note, is not a precedent; we are willing to break up the bill provided, of course, a reasonable parliamentary calendar is set to complete the debate on each one of the parts of the bill so divided.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, not only is parliamentary reform a necessity, it is also an urgency.

It is true that as soon as I was appointed President of the Privy Council, I indicated that I was interested in modernizing this institution, in making it more human and efficient. But one must also consider the circumstances that have prevailed in these last two years since my appointment in order to understand where discussions stand in respect of the necessary changes to our rules. In the first place, I should say that when I was appointed when we were elected as a government in 1980, we inherited the aftermath of two elections in less than a year. We had to negotiate and put some sort of order in the business of supply that was in a mess and to which the Standing Orders were no longer applicable, due to the fact that the main estimates could not have been tabled in time because of the election date. All this is very technical, but the consequences were tremendous. An agreement was needed to revive rules that included time limitations. Negotiations were required, an agreement had to be concluded, some sort of order had to be put in the whole area of supply proceedings that are the *raison d'être* of this Parliament, the very foundation of the House of Commons and the Senate.

Such an agreement was reached after negotiations. We also inherited a tremendous accumulation of legislative measures that were on the Order Paper, again because of two elections in less than a year, and we managed during the first months prior to the summer of 1980, from April to the end of June or early July, to dispose of a backlog of legislative measures with the passing of some 25 to 30 bills. Then summer came. We had our summer recess and hon. members had other duties to perform in their constituencies, meeting with their constituents. With the fall of 1980 we had the constitutional debate. Everyone remembers the atmosphere that prevailed in this House during the constitutional debate. Everyone remembers the bitterness that was rampant here. It was far from being conducive to the consensus needed to change the rules and proceed to parliamentary reform. So it was that through those months from the fall of 1980 to the spring of 1981, we had that hijacking of Parliament I referred to earlier. The atmosphere was assuredly not favourable to attempts at negotiating procedural changes. After the constitutional debate, the need arose last fall for a second budget to address the economic situation.