

Supply

That was written in the *Sarnia Observer* some 14 years ago.

Mr. Benjamin: Who said what you quoted earlier?

Mr. Cullen: I know those asking will want to get a copy of it. If they go back to *Hansard* of October 23, 1969, they will find that the Hon. Member for Sarnia that day made those particular comments.

One comment particularly made by Members opposite concerns the so-called lack of accountability as a result of the Estimates. I would invite those Members, if they will take the time, to look at the Estimates presently being studied before the various committees. They will find that very few questions are asked about the Estimates. The only questions asked are on issues that happened to be particularly attractive on that particular day. They do not concern whether a Minister has ten more person years in his Department or why so many people have been added or subtracted in management. Those questions do not ask why a departmental budget has risen by \$100 million or \$200 million. Usually it is a political question that is asked. I am not being critical, although I sometimes think there is a bit of hypocrisy when I hear the Government is not being held accountable. We now have the Estimates before several committees. All kinds of information is made available by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Gray) and by Treasury Board. There is an opportunity to do an effective examination of the accounts of the Government. That opportunity is not taken in too many cases. Here is an area where, if Members of the Opposition feel they do not have an important enough role to play because they are not introducing legislation, they might give some thought to using the committees as they were meant to be used.

● (1620)

Our special committee had the opportunity to visit Westminster. One of the areas that impressed me was the idea of communicating through the usual channel. House Leaders do not work one with the other; they talk in the House, they debate in the House. The usual channel is a civil servant, the Government House Leader, the Whip of whoever is handling the matter who moves a particular program for the week. The usual channel discusses the program with the Opposition. Perhaps the Opposition says: "We do not like this, move it to another day." Negotiations take place in that particular atmosphere. I often wonder how House Leaders for the Government side and for the Opposition Parties harangue one another in a debate and then immediately move into a House Leaders' meeting and try to resolve something in a co-operative way. It seems to me the whole atmosphere is poisoned from the standpoint of working out some co-operative method whereby House business can be moved forward. On that basis I think there is something to be said for the British idea of the usual channel.

Mr. Benjamin: You know better than that.

Mr. Cullen: I am happy this particular debate was initiated today. I believe the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton

indicated that probably there would not be many people listening to it or for that matter interested in it. But those of us who have a feeling for this place, and particularly for the House of Commons, have an obligation to read some of the reports put out by our Committee. We have an obligation to try to determine how we can make a better and more important contribution, how we can make this place more relevant for people who come after us and serve in this capacity. If the motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition does not do anything more or accomplish anything more than that, if we have done that, we will have fulfilled our obligations.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen), who has been here as long as I have. I look forward to June 22. Does the Hon. Member think it proper that when a House Leader for an Opposition Party submits a proposal in writing to the Government House Leader on how to deal with a Bill in a much more expeditious manner—or deal in a much more expeditious manner with at least parts of it—that it deserves the courtesy of a reply, yes, no or maybe, and that it deserves some further discussion? If the Hon. Member agrees with that, then would he also give us a commitment that he will talk with his own House Leader? I am speaking about Bill C-155 on the statutory grain rates in particular.

Mr. Cullen: First I must say to the Hon. Member that I have not been in the House as long as he has. He may have forgotten that I lost my seat in 1979, so I have a gestation period shortage of about nine months.

At the beginning I thought the Hon. Member was making a case. Then he said "if we are prepared to put parts of a Bill through." I think the House Leader has to worry about all of the legislation. During the bell ringing on the energy Bill, the House Leaders did meet and did work out a scheme whereby that very controversial and difficult piece of legislation became pieces of legislation which were passed before the end of the year.

We have not finished the debate on the Crow by a long shot. It may be the Government House Leader is looking at it. I am not being paid even a Parliamentary Secretary's salary so I do not want to usurp the role of a Minister, but I have so much respect for the House leader we have that I expect the Hon. Member will get a reply soon.

Mr. Benjamin: That is what he said.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to enter the debate today. This debate is one of considerable interest to me. I am pleased to follow the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen). I served with him on the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure. I have enjoyed his contributions in the Committee and his comments here today.

I was going to comment on the remarks made by the Hon. Member for Burin-St. George's (Mr. Simmons), but I think the Hon. Member for Nepean-Carleton (Mr. Baker) did a