

Privilege—Mr. Diefenbaker

Mr. Speaker, the suggestion made by the right hon. member for Prince Albert implies a change to the Standing Orders of this House. I fully agree with him but I think he has suggested only 1/116 of the parliamentary reform that should be done here in the Canadian parliament. There are 116 Standing Orders and the hon. member complains about only one of them, but a more serious reform should be considered to modernize our parliament, to make it more efficient, to rejuvenate this institution and also allow our constituents whom we meet regularly and who are now watching what happens in this House through television, to allow them to witness a performance that would be more worthy of parliamentarians and politicians.

In conclusion, I subscribe to the intent of the right hon. member for Prince Albert, if I made a right interpretation of his desire to change this institution to make it more efficient, but I contend that he does not go far enough and that he suggests only 1/116 of the parliamentary reform for which we have been asking on this side of the House at least since my coming here, three years ago, and which is often denied to us because of the lack of consent from opposition members.

[English]

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I regret very much that the parliamentary secretary in the latter part of his remarks attacked the institution which he purported to revere at the beginning of his remarks. I listened to his submission with great interest. He mentioned the rules of this place, and he is quite right in respect to some of them.

One of the problems in the House of Commons is that the government has always tended to use the Parliament of Canada, the House of Commons, and view it as a legislative mill as if the only business which was important was the business the government chose to designate as important. Over the course of the last little while the private member in terms of being able to advance something in this House has slowly but inexorably had his rights limited and removed, all in the name of the legislative necessities of the government. That is a fact.

We have been sitting in this House now since October, the beginning of the session. Unfortunately there has been no move on the part of my hon. friend's senior to put a reference before the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, not one. What has happened, therefore, is that these rights have been limited. As the government has come to regard parliament only as its own precinct for legislation we have tended to look away from the other side of parliament, and seek an opportunity that all members on all sides of the House ought to have to examine the relevancy, the propriety, and direction of programs. Somehow or other, Mr. Speaker, this whole thing has gone out of whack. We might as well be candid with each other. One of the reasons that Standing Order 43's are shouted down, sometimes by one and sometimes by many—

Mr. Diefenbaker: Generally by one.

[Mr. Pinard.]

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): —is that the government is always concerned that there will suddenly be a debate if consent is given and then the matter becomes a matter for discussion before the House or potentially so.

I say to the hon. member that members of parliament do not put motions frivolously under Standing Order 43 most of the time. They put them forward using one of the few vehicles left to private members to put a point before the public and perhaps influence the government, or at least bring public opinion to bear on a matter that may concern them with respect to their constituents.

There is this ungodly fear that something from a private member might come forward to upset the government's program, and if you look at the order paper today the program is pretty slim in terms of meeting the necessities of the country.

The other day when speaking on this topic, the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) proposed a solution to this matter. You will recall the solution, Mr. Speaker, I do not have to repeat it. I do not know whether that is appropriate to get by this impasse which led the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of Privy Council to call two motions with regard to the status of women on International Women's Day frivolous. They certainly were not advanced in any frivolous way.

• (1602)

Mr. Pinard: You are not being honest.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): When he said today that he was concerned about the government's program, he was admitting that this matter, the whole question of the operation of Standing Order 43 and the right of private members to advance these motions, was always subject to the convenience of the government. It was not intended that way.

It is time the public realized what is happening in terms of my right and the right of other private members to bring forward motions under Standing Order 43. It is important that those motions do not just occupy members of the opposition. There are members of the government who are suddenly having the courage to get up under Standing Order 43. Some of those motions should be examined.

It is unfortunate that backbenchers are having denied to them, day after day, the right to have something dealt with by the House of Commons, something that is important to them as members and that may indeed go beyond the importance of a particular member's responsibility.

If we are to get out of this impasse, it would be well to remember that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization dealt with matters that were presented prior to the last session of this parliament. It is equally important that there is anxiety on all sides of the House to deal with reform of the parliamentary process.

Perhaps the right hon. member for Prince Albert in dealing with this matter under Standing Order 43 has managed to focus the attention of the public on a House of Commons where the rights of the private member are being overbur-