

The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker

item of expenditure except in those few last hours when the matter comes before the House, as happened three years ago when the House voted expenditures of \$18 billion between 8.30 at night and 1.30 in the morning.

The first thing that must be restored to parliament is this right: that ministers shall stand in their places and shall be questioned individually in this chamber, sitting in committee, on their expenditures.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: If that right were in existence, do you think that the Prime Minister would have spent \$95,000 refurbishing his summer residence; that there would have been an expenditure on the official residence, 24 Sussex Drive, of a quarter of a million dollars; that the centre block office would have been refurbished at a cost of \$61,000? That would not have taken place if in this chamber we had the right to vote against such expenditures. And so on I could go on the subject of waste and extravagance.

● (1440)

Under my government, the total expenditure was around \$6 billion. It is now four times that amount. There is no control whatsoever. When the Prime Minister is soliloquizing about parliament, let him make that change in our rules. I do not care about limitation of time in which to discuss, but I think it is necessary to make changes. However, if the Prime Minister seriously wants to restore parliament, the acceptance of that suggestion which is traditional in our country would do more than all the verbal promises and exhortations in which any of us may indulge.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I regret to advise the right hon. member that his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Continue.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had no idea of the time I had left; because I have been interrupted. I express to the House my deep appreciation.

The Prime Minister says the question period should be improved. I am not at all convinced that oral questions have not arrived at the point where they bear no relationship to the necessity of being answered immediately. We have spread this period out and out. When I first came here, if there were two or three questions before orders of the day, that would be it. One of the reasons for the lengthy question period today is that this government will not answer questions that are put on the order paper.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: They simply leave them there. Time goes on. From session to session and parliament to parliament, they remain unanswered. What should be done is this. Starred questions should be answered in three days, at the outside. Other questions should be answered within four or five days. If that were done, it would save a great deal of time for the House in the three-quarters of an hour

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

or hour before orders of the day. Will it be done? Will we be able to get answers to questions?

I wish to refer to one example of how the government answers the opposition. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) is not a provocative person. Some others around me are. I have been in his position. He asked an ordinary question today. Did he get an answer from the Prime Minister? He was simply playing around. Absolute power is a wonderful thing, as long as it is not used absolutely. That is what was shown here today. I want to give a prize example, for the benefit of those members who just came into the chamber. On February 28, 1972, the Leader of the Opposition asked a question of the Prime Minister. It was not of a nature that should arouse one at all. After he decided he would listen to what was being asked, the Prime Minister said:

That was your God-damned question.

That is in *Hansard*. That is not parliamentary language. If it is, this institution will certainly not live. When you think of all that could be done by parliament, with all the ability that is here, when you finally come down to it it is the government that decides whether or not it is going to live up to parliament. Your Honour has been in the chair for three days. It is not for me to say anything of a flattering nature. All I say to you is this: the manner in which you have discharged your responsibilities assures that you will indeed be a spokesman for all members of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Let us together restore parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: The government House leader applauded. If he, in his august and high position as leader in the House, will translate that applause into actuality in the rules, his arrival at that position will be marked as a forward day in the history of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not expect answers to be so full as to cover everything under the sun, but I do expect them to be handed down and, above all, to be true. If we together bring about reform of the House and its rules, no one will be a more enthusiastic supporter than me. However, if the House leader brings in any substitute, caricature change in order to gain for the government more and more power, to the absolute exclusion of the opposition, parliament will in fact cease effectively to exist.

The Prime Minister said he was going to reform the Senate. Whenever he is in difficulty, he thinks of things to be done to take the eyes of the people off the problems that face the country. I remember very well when Mr. King defeated me in Prince Albert in the election of 1926. The major part of his policy was that he was going to reform the Senate. In sepulchral tones he spoke of that body. He said, "We are going to put an end to it." He secured the consent of everyone he appointed to the Senate that they would agree to their own dissolution. When in 1940 we asked to see those consents, he said they