

Business of the House

Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I think it has become apparent that we are not getting anywhere. If we have just a little bit of time in which to think this whole matter over, I believe we shall be able to come to a decision much more amicably than we perhaps would today. For that reason I am asking leave to adjourn this debate.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there a seconder to the motion?

Mr. Cruickshank: Grey North.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn is not before the house.

Mr. Howard C. Green (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, I submit to you and to the other members of the house that a serious question is raised by this debate, and I trust that you will bear with me for a few minutes while I try to analyse it in what I hope will be a nonpartisan way.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Abbott: That would be hard for you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Green: I realize that at times we all must show certain partisanship in this house, but I meant what I said when I indicated that I planned to try to analyze this question in an unbiased way. The question is whether or not the members of the government are taking the right attitude towards the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne. Let me direct the minds of hon. members back to the announcements made in the press about this session. In Vancouver I read that the speech from the throne would be considered for only a day or two and that we would then go on to discuss this proposed union with Newfoundland. In other words, the Prime Minister and the cabinet from the start have had the idea that this throne speech debate would last for a matter of only a few hours and then would be adjourned, or in effect would be pushed aside and used as a filler between other items of government business. The result must inevitably be that the debate on the speech from the throne will be of little use to the members of this house or to the country.

We saw this same attitude taken at the opening of the last session. Back in December 1947 we were all surprised to learn, again from the press, that the house was to be called into session a few days before Christmas, and that the reason it was being called was to deal with the Geneva trade treaties. I may be wrong in that, but I think that was the main reason given for calling the house

in December. Mention may also have been made of the austerity program. In any event, I came east then believing that the main reason for calling that session was to consider the Geneva treaties. When we came here we were met with exactly the same plan that is being attempted at this session. The speech from the throne was to be dealt with for a day or two, and then we were to go on with this emergency business. As it turned out, the debate on the Geneva treaties lasted for two days, and then was adjourned until after Christmas, when it was again adjourned. The treaties were sent to a committee and the committee made a report, but the house never dealt with it or with the treaties; they have not been approved to this day. They are to come up again at this present session. On that former occasion the same attitude that is being taken today was taken by the cabinet towards parliament and towards the debate on the speech from the throne.

I submit that there are some serious objections to that attitude; in fact, there are grave dangers in the government of Canada adopting that attitude. First of all, the Prime Minister and his colleagues have placed far too little importance on this throne speech debate, which can only mean that they place far too little importance on parliament itself, on the private members of this house, whether they be in the opposition or on the government side, and on the people represented in this house by the private members. The keystone of our democratic system of government is parliament, not the cabinet. Parliament is composed of men and women entrusted by their constituencies with the responsibility of leading the nation. Under our system the leadership of this nation should not come from the cabinet; in the final analysis it should come from parliament. The cabinet is only the executive of parliament.

At the opening of each session the private members gather here from all over Canada, fresh from contacts with the people. They know the problems that are worrying the people and the action that the people want to have taken by parliament. We who come here as private members are certainly much closer to the people than any member of the cabinet can possibly be. He is here in Ottawa practically all the time; he has many other things to do and cannot be in such close touch with the people as a private member.

If the debate on the speech from the throne is held immediately after the opening of parliament it gives the private members a chance to bring the views of their constituents directly to the attention of the cabinet. That is important, because it can, or it should, influence the legislation that will be brought