

*The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker*

with the responsibility of an opposition and is of primary importance to the maintenance of our parliamentary system. While he spoke I sent out for this speech and I am going to refer to one or two matters in it. I said this, and this is the particular quotation that he used:

If parliament is to be preserved as a living institution His Majesty's loyal opposition must fearlessly perform its functions . . . It upholds and maintains the rights of minorities against majorities. It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the cabinet of the rights of the people. It should supervise all expenditures and prevent over-expenditure by exposing to the light of public opinion wasteful expenditures or worse . . . it asks questions and elicits information . . . It must scrutinize every action by the government . . .

Parliament is a place where in full discussion freedom is preserved, where one side advances arguments and the other examines them and where decisions are arrived at after passing through the crucible of public discussion.

Then he quoted also what the absence of a strong opposition results in and then I added these words which he did not quote:

An opposition does not properly perform its functions unless it examines all expenditures made with a searching eye and with fearless criticism, yet members of the House of Commons have no proper facilities to enable the full examination of the public accounts and estimates. Debates on estimates are futile. An expenditure of millions of dollars that are totally unjustified could conceivably be passed without much danger of detection. . . I believe that the public accounts committee should be modelled after the British committee.

Then I go on to explain as follows:

Under our practice and it has been continued for several decades, the public accounts committee is under the chairmanship of a supporter of the government as are the majority of the committee and, in consequence, a critical examination of wasteful expenditure is not encouraged.

If parliament is to be made as effective an instrument in the modern world as it should be the procedure of parliament should be modernized and brought up to date.

Then finally at the end I used these words:

Parliament must continue to be the custodian of freedom. To that end it must constantly change its procedure to meet the changing needs of a modern world but must be changeless in its concept and tradition. Parliament will only remain the guardian of freedom and our free institution so long as His Majesty's loyal opposition is fully responsible and effective in the discharge of its functions.

Mr. Speaker, that was in 1949 when we were in opposition. Now in 1958, having the first opportunity to carry out the criticism of an earlier day, in the first speech from the throne we make provision to assure that there shall be that full examination without which parliament cannot discharge its responsibilities.

I am not today going to be drawn into any political arguments of a partisan nature, but may I say that my own experience through

the years has been that there were changes which should be made. We advocated those changes over and over again, when those who now sit opposite were sitting on this side of the house; we advocated them throughout the sessions, the latest example being in 1957 when we were still in opposition in this chamber. We brought this question before the house in order to make the committees of parliament effective institutions and to enable private members to take advantage of opportunities to discharge their service which otherwise might be denied them.

I will not go back further than 1956. On February 23 of that year my hon. friend who is now the Minister of Justice (Mr. Fulton) moved an amendment to the amendment moved by the then prime minister which was to the effect that a select committee be designated to consider such of the estimates as may be referred to it and to report its findings and recommendations to the house from time to time. The attitude we took at that time was that this was insufficient and an amendment was accordingly made by the present Minister of Justice adding these words:

—and that the said committee have power to send for persons, papers and records.

Where were those who today read the speech I made in 1949? There was no consideration at all given to this matter and a committee was set up without power to call persons and papers, an emasculated committee and one that could not discharge the duties which ordinarily would be its responsibility. On February 26, 1957, which was the last occasion to which I will refer, the then prime minister, the Right Hon. Mr. St. Laurent, moved that a committee consider the estimates and so on, and again the same stand was taken on the part of the members of this party, the result once more being the result of other days.

One of the major problems of government in the British traditions, as I have found them, is how opportunities should be provided for private members to make their contributions in the house. I care not what parliament there may be, members coming to the house for the first time with new ideas will find, unless work is made available to them, that they are confronted with a sense of frustration which is one of the most detrimental and enervating outcomes of the inability to do something effective.

I say to new members, and there are many in this house, that one of the first requisites, indeed the major requisite, to the proper discharge of parliamentary responsibility is that there shall be on the part of