

*The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker*

—but not, as Moncreiff has said, by “a wakeful and morbid suspiciousness”, but carefully and fairly, we intend to examine all proposals that come before this House of Commons.

Governments with overwhelming majorities often make shortcuts through parliamentary procedure. They do not like to be held down by parliament. It is so much easier to pass executive orders. One of the great writers on British constitutionalism said recently that in the past twenty years the cabinets, the executives, of governments in all parts of the British commonwealth have regained almost all the powers that a cabinet had two hundred years ago. In two wars many of parliament's rights and prerogatives were abdicated. It is hard to regain them.

I think one thing the government should do at this time—I ask hon. members in all parts of the house to join me in this request—is to assure us that the course regarding orders in council adopted last year will be extended. On March 9 last the Prime Minister agreed to table from time to time all orders in council, or a summation of them. That is good so far as it goes, but it should go still further.

I should like to make a suggestion which would give an opportunity for service to the new members who have a feeling of frustration because of their inability to find anything to do. I should like to see a committee of parliament set up, that would examine delegated authority—in other words a committee on ministerial powers. At the moment I am not criticizing the principle of delegated power, but if it is carried too far it is a denial of the democratic system of government.

Delegated legislative power results from the technical nature of most legislation and the difficulties involved in legislating to meet complex conditions. In the United Kingdom it has been found necessary to set up a committee in this regard, and I should like to see a similar committee appointed by this house.

Such a committee would report to the house from time to time on all orders in council passed where there is a matter of principle in issue, and where the question of delegated power arises. Where legislative power is conferred, the committee would make the necessary criticisms of orders passed by civil servants under the powers granted by legislation enacted by parliament. Members of the house would be given an opportunity to serve. There should be no difficulty about the government having a majority in the committee. Its members would be charged with noting any breaches of parliamentary privileges and democratic

rights; in fact in orders in council it would be a watchdog in the preservation of our democratic rights.

I trust that the government will set up some of the committees very soon, particularly the radio committee. It is understandable that the radio committee was not set up at the last session. Since then, however, the question of television has been dealt with by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and a question has been raised with regard to increasing the radio receiving licence fee. If I know anything of the attitude of the vast majority of the people, they will resist any increase in that fee. The whole field of radio should be examined with a view to making recommendations, in accordance with the principles upon which our national radio was set up, to the end that such improvements as are necessary may be made.

The mention of government boards brings to mind that today an order was issued by the board of transport commissioners increasing freight rates in this country. It is not for me to say that parliament should have an overriding control over a board set up by parliament, and I make no such suggestion. In the three western provinces the average level of freight rates before the 21 per cent increase was 14 per cent higher than it was in Ontario and Quebec. When the 21 per cent increase across the board was added, that discrimination against the three western provinces was increased to 16.9 per cent. A further addition of eight per cent will increase that discrimination to approximately 18.25 per cent.

I realize that increases have become necessary; you cannot keep freight rates down when costs are rising. But I do say that it is untimely to have such an increase put into effect while the Turgeon commission is sitting. Before any further increase was made there should have been recommendations for the removal of the discrimination which exists today against the three western provinces, as well as others. This is a matter on which I want to hear some of my hon. friends from Saskatchewan speak when they take part in this debate. The announced increase is in effect a continuance and intensification of discrimination which has had a damaging effect upon the building up in the western provinces of other than an agricultural economy.

There is one other committee that I should like to see the government set up. It has to do with a subject with which I am not going to deal at length, but one which is important to the future of Canada, namely, the preservation of our fundamental freedoms.

In 1947 a committee of the house sat for a considerable length of time hearing evidence