

*Unemployment Continuance Act*

though not specific, to which the money might be applied. There was thus, up to a certain point, the saving grace of appearance.

An incipient dictatorship was in this way introduced in the first measure. That was what it amounted to, through the government being given a very large sum of money, much larger than it needed for the completion of the fiscal year, a sum to do with pretty much what it pleased. There was moreover conferred upon the ministry, by the general terms of the act, the power to disregard any real control by the Commons or parliament. So, when we come to the next year, 1931, we find the government going a step farther. At the session of 1931 they abandoned even the appearance of trying to conform to the methods of parliamentary procedure, and they asked parliament to give them a blank cheque. They asked for power to take an unlimited amount of money out of the treasury which means the power of granting taxes to an unlimited amount. Never before in the history of any British parliament has that been done. I ask hon. gentlemen opposite, if they can, to cite a single instance where any parliament was asked by a responsible ministry to part with its right of controlling taxation and expenditure by appropriating moneys without limit to the ministry of the day. This autocratic ministry, however, claimed, and not only claimed but secured this power, under what to all intents and purposes in the last session was a species of closure.

That was going pretty far, but the ministry went further. Not satisfied with having, under these general terms, secured all the money it needed to do with as it pleased, it demanded and secured also the power to legislate as it pleased, that sacred right which belongs only to parliament, and for the sake of which parliament exists. They have thus taken to themselves the power to make new laws. Do not let us deceive ourselves. It is laws that are being made in secret session of executive council. These hon. gentlemen made laws with respect to banking, insurance, the police force of the country, with respect to many objects that were never contemplated at the time they obtained from parliament the power they did. In addition they have created new offences and penalties in the way of fines and imprisonment, penalties which stand to-day as part of the law of the land. All of this power was taken away from parliament. What is parliament for if it is not to protect the people with respect to the laws which shall govern them? What do we mean by self-government? Why have a parliament, if a ministry is to have rights and powers of this kind?

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

One would imagine it was impossible for a ministry to go further than that, but hon. gentlemen opposite have done so. Having tasted absolute authority to the extent I have mentioned, they were determined to extend it still further if they could. There was one limitation and one only which they put on their action of last session; it was put on as a result of the vigorous opposition that was urged on this side. It was this: We contended that at no time, whether parliament was in session or not in session, should any such absolute powers be given to a ministry. My right hon. friend the Prime Minister saw something of the force of our objection. He would not admit its force for the period in which parliament was not in session, but he had not the countenance to force that measure through under closure, if need be, in a form which would yield those powers to the ministry while parliament was in session. Although he brought in the act with the expiration of its provisions originally fixed at March 31, when it was pointed out to him from this side over and over again that parliament would be in session on March 31 and all through the month of March, he himself said that he would change the date to March 1, and he changed it. Why? In order, so he said, that there would be no question of usurping the powers of parliament. Last year, he saw that his action meant the usurpation of the powers of parliament, but since then, under the exercise of autocratic power, he has become more and more indifferent to parliament. This year he comes along and says: I will now go a step further; I will usurp the authority of parliament, while parliament itself is in session, and I will do something more than that, and this I think, Mr. Speaker, is the most amazing thing that any Prime Minister ever did. He said: I will go the length of giving reasons to parliament why its power should be usurped. He gave his reasons, and I will, in a moment or two, quote them to the house. I am pointing out now the length to which autocratic methods, once they are countenanced, may carry a ministry even in a free country.

What is the situation at the present time? We have a measure before us which asks us deliberately to allow our rights to be usurped during the time that we are in session here. The provisions of this measure apply from the first of March to the first of May. I assume that parliament will still be in session on the first of May, that we are going to be in session here all the time between now and the first of May. Whether parliament is in session or whether parliament is not in session, the