

Morality in Government

Disraeli once said to an interrupter in the British House of Commons: "Truth travels slowly, my friend, but I think it will reach even you in time".

Mr. Diefenbaker: That quotation has been used over and over again over the years.

Mr. Pearson: Perhaps my right hon. friend will just contain himself for a short time and then he will be able to spend the rest of the afternoon speaking, and I know how he loves to do that.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have the evidence here.

Mr. Pearson: What concerned me, Mr. Speaker, at the end of 1964 and what I sought, was information as to the extent to which over a period of ten years there had been political intervention or attempted political intervention in police investigations, in the administration of justice and in our processes of law, to determine to what extent there had been abuse of position.

At that time—most hon. members in this house ought to remember this because they were here—very serious allegations were made to the effect that a minister had intervened for political reasons in a police investigation. At that time there were allegations that at least one member of parliament had attempted to intervene in the administration of justice. At that time, Mr. Speaker, I had learned that my own parliamentary secretary had made certain telephone calls, and on learning that this was so I called him in and received from him first hand evidence of his indiscretion; and I asked him to resign that afternoon and to inform the house that very day. I did so not because he was guilty of wrongdoing, but because he had left himself open to the charge of improper exercise of authority in his position.

At that time, Mr. Speaker—I have the record here but I do not want to take up too much time of the house by putting examples on the record—there were allegations of pressures brought to bear on members of parliament by criminals, by the underworld. At that time we were setting up the Dorion inquiry. All these allegations and disclosures were made and continued to be made for months after this period until we reached the point where my hon. friend, from Brandon-Souris, who himself spoke last night, said that there was a lack of integrity in high places in the government. That was a very mild statement compared with other things which were said about us afterwards and during the election campaign.

At that time the Leader of the Opposition said that this house, as the supreme court of parliament, has the right to know that justice is administered without fear or favour, that it has the right to know that the administration of justice shall not depend on the persuasion—he meant political persuasion, I suppose—of alleged wrongdoers, that it has the right to know that it will not be strangled by the concealment of facts.

This, Mr. Speaker, was the background to the request which I made. All of these allegations and charges worried me as they must have worried every other member of parliament. But perhaps they worried me most of all. That is why I asked for information, if there was any such information, about other cases which were in any way similar, or which were related to these charges in which members of parliament were involved.

● (3:50 p.m.)

I thought I had to know the nature and the magnitude of this problem. It was my duty to make inquiries and to try to find out. I was as deeply disturbed as any member of this house by the disclosures of pressures on members of parliament by dubious and, at times, criminal elements. I was deeply disturbed, as it was my duty to be, by the allegations which had been made. Was the situation regarding interference by members of parliament as bad as was being painted? I decided to try to find out from the facts as disclosed in the record.

So I asked, Mr. Speaker, not for any new inquiries to be made, not for the police to report on or look into the private conduct of members of parliament, not to search for personal scandals, but to give me a record whether there had been in the past the kind of contact with dubious and criminal elements now charged, reports of which had been increasing month by month. How deep did this sort of thing go? Was parliament becoming a victim to criminal pressures? That was demanded by the opposition: that we investigate, that we look into these matters.

My request, Mr. Speaker, and I made it, was not for information about the Munsinger case. I have learned since that at that time many people apparently knew something about the case. Apparently rumours and gossip were rife even then. I knew nothing about that case. I had never heard the name so I could not possibly have had this case in mind when I made this inquiry.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.