

Motion Respecting House Vote

time, there have been three major assaults on the rights of parliament. This is the third one and the worst. The first assault on the rights of parliament was made in 1955 in the defence production debate, to which reference has been made on several occasions, when Right Hon. C. D. Howe wanted the house to give him complete, unlimited and perpetual powers under that very important act.

Mr. Horner (Acadia): The present minister was his deputy.

Mr. Churchill: The Conservative opposition resisted that attempt. We said, "This is not right". We trusted Right Hon. C. D. Howe, who was an honourable gentleman and a very capable minister. But we said, "What about those who may succeed you in the future?" Having seen those who have succeeded him, I say, thank God we took that stand.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Churchill: People say to me "That debate was in the past; it did not count". It counted. We fought that issue for 11 days. We debated the rights of parliament. Some of my good friends in the press gallery said "You will never get that principle over to the people of Canada". The people of Canada are much smarter than some members of the press gallery at that time gave them credit for. The issue became clear to the people of Canada. No one said to us at that time "The vote is a foregone conclusion". It never occurred to us that it might be. There were 51 Conservative members on this side of the house and 170 Liberals. They overflowed that area. We had the members of the C.C.F. party on this side—a very uncomfortable position for the Conservative party. We debated the issue for 11 days. What happened? Fortunately I made a summary of the events at that time and I refreshed my memory. The debate started lamely; not all of our members wanted to participate. We were scoffed at by various people. Some who heard about this wrote in or 'phoned in and said "You are on the wrong track. Stop it".

Gradually the issue became clear to members in the House of Commons and to the people in the country. When the government found that it was in difficulty, its supporters presented an amendment to us at which we looked very closely and which we found too devious for our taste. The debate continued, and the government showed obstinacy. Finally, prime minister St. Laurent, a respected

[Mr. Churchill.]

statesman of this country, did the honourable thing. He said "This is not right. We will put in a limitation on the defence production act", and the limitation was imposed. On that day he protected the rights of parliament. Suppose we had dismissed that bill and said "It does not matter, we are out-voted before we start". Who would have the authority to do that today in a government which sustains the successive changes in the cabinet which we have seen here in the last five years? Would it be someone like Right Hon. C. D. Howe? On that occasion we protected the rights of parliament.

The second major assault on the rights of parliament was made in 1956 in the great pipe line debate. It did not start off as a debate on a matter in which the freedom of speech would be affected. Other issues were considered. But by the time the debate came to its conclusion, freedom of speech in this house became the main issue for which we fought. Closure was imposed before certain sections of the act were considered, and a bitter battle was fought. During the course of the strife, there were people who said "You must not do this, you must stop. You are destroying parliament. This is not right. End the debate now. You have been at it too long, and the vote is a foregone conclusion", because there were 51 Conservatives, and 23 members of the C.C.F., who were supporting our position and whose position we were supporting, against 170 Liberals. I give full credit to the C.C.F. party for the tremendous battle they put up for freedom of speech, led by my colleague in the House of Commons who is also sometimes my friend in Winnipeg North Centre.

Freedom of speech is important. It is vital to the operation of this institution. Men of experience saw that at the time, and we fought the battle. The Liberal party almost destroyed parliament. They ruthlessly sacrificed the Speaker, and almost destroyed his position in the house. But we retained freedom of speech in this chamber, and without that what have you got?

The third major attack on the rights of parliament is occurring in the house now. The reason I take this so seriously is not only due to my conviction with regard to these matters but also to the experiences that I have had here, and everyone is conditioned by his upbringing and his experience. I saw from the beginning that it would be extremely difficult, that a crisis would arise here and a contest of wills between this side and the