

Northern Ontario Pipe Line Corporation

What they should be told is that once our government has made up its mind to lend money to the oil barons of Texas and has cracked the whip over the Liberal caucus all that remains is to debate the issue in the House of Commons, that that debate may run for several days or weeks but can be choked off by closure and therefore once government policy has been announced and legislation introduced into the house the green light has been given to the pipe line project and the money will be forthcoming in due course. The Trans-Canada pipe line company will get its handout of \$80 million from this government, for this government is not only all powerful but is fully determined to pursue this wretched course of paying tribute to Texas oil barons, and nobody can keep them from their folly. All the opposition can do, to use the very apt phrase of the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggar, is to expose them, and because of fear of exposure the government has clamped on closure.

The issue confronting us may be summed up in one sentence: Because the Tennessee Gas Company has cornered the market in 34-inch pipe, the Canadian people must now be taxed to pay tribute to Texas oil barons and the House of Commons is being muzzled by an arrogant oligarchy.

American influence on Canadian life has permeated right into our House of Commons. If it were not for this unwise, unnecessary and improvident arrangement to pass legislation by June 7 our parliamentary customs and usages would not now be in jeopardy.

Let us see what has happened to our customs and our usages. Not only has closure been applied at an unprecedentedly early stage in our proceedings, but yesterday the Minister of Finance, relying on the government majority, abrogated the customary procedure of questions before the orders of the day. The question period is one of the most valuable privileges of the House of Commons. Had it not been for the question period during the last several weeks we would have known even less about the pipe line problem than does the Prime Minister. We are witnessing here a continuation of the serious undermining of the power of parliament. The system is but imperfectly understood. People are under the impression that the opposition can prevent the government from carrying out its policy. The government, preying on those misunderstandings, uses its present methods to stifle debate and committee investigation and prevents full disclosure of the facts. The government pretends that closure is necessary this week. It is a thoroughly bad precedent that is being set and I hope it will not be forgotten. That is the seriousness

[Mr. Churchill.]

of the situation as I see it; this erosion of the institution which is the centre of our democracy.

In the book entitled "Parliament" by Professor W. Ivor Jennings which is a standard work on the British parliamentary system and which every hon. member of parliament should study—

Mr. Fleming: Especially the government.

Mr. Churchill: —he sums up the function of the opposition in parliament. He points out very clearly that the power of the opposition itself rests only on sufferance. There is nothing whatever in the constitutional machinery that prevents the opposition from being suppressed. The government, being as powerful as it is, could wipe out the opposition if it so desired. The opposition cannot out-vote the majority; it can only defy it and appeal to the people.

An hon. Member: And expose it.

Mr. Churchill: What are the checks and balances in this system to offset an all-powerful government? There are three main checks; the freedom of election, the freedom of assembly and the freedom of organization. If you can have free elections and if you may assemble freely, and if you have the freedom to organize, you can effectively check a government which tends to be all powerful. The checks and balances are mutually interdependent; one alone cannot be overthrown. As long as they remain it is the function of the opposition not only to see that they operate but also to prevent gradual and insidious encroachments. We have witnessed here today a gradual and insidious encroachment, unprecedented and completely unnecessary.

We should have been permitted the right to conduct our examination of this resolution as we do all other resolutions in this house. We should be permitted on second reading to conduct a full debate when we reach that stage. When we reach the stage of committee of the whole house after second reading we should be permitted to fully examine the bill then before us, item by item, and receive answers to questions. We should have the chance at that stage to raise amendments and perhaps succeed in having the government agree to some of our proposals. Similarly we should have the chance on third reading to conduct a full debate. What faces us now? Closure; no debate; restricted debate.

An hon. Member: What are you doing now?

Mr. Churchill: We are restricted to 20 minutes and the subject matter is worth a two-hour discourse.

Mr. Harris: You are doing very well.