

*Peace River Election*

seriously by hon. gentlemen across the way. I do not blame them for taking it seriously; in the absence of all real argument it would do; but I need not to say, Sir, that it is impossible that this petition should be thrown out because of a slip of the tongue.

His second point was that if this petition be received we shall have two trials proceeding at the same time. I think the hon. gentleman himself subsequently abandoned that point. We all know that the trial cannot go on, unfortunately—that is, unfortunately if the hands of this House be tied—while the House is in session. There is therefore nothing in that point.

His third point was that even if the petition were received Collins would not benefit by our receiving it because there would be obstruction in the committee and the like. I wonder whether it occurs to you, Sir, that a threat of improper action on the part of a committee is a reason for refusing the just rights of a petitioner. If it be not, there is nothing in the third point.

His fourth point was that if the House received the petition in this case, petitions to parliament would be in order every time a deputy returning officer was mistaken. This petitioner is not here on the ground of any mistake. My hon. friend stressed the question of mistakes; he sought to point out how mistakes could be easily made, honestly made. I wonder why? It is useless to talk about mistakes in the presence of absolute crime, admitted and proved. Why do I say "admitted"? I say admitted, because as I understand the matter—and I have made the same statement before without contradiction—the appeal relied upon by the Minister of Customs and Excise is taken merely upon a trifling technicality and not upon the merits of the case, not upon the facts that have been proved. Therefore I am well within the mark when I say that the real argument made by the Minister of Customs and Excise is that at the present time this House can do nothing. We must remember that that statement is made after his answer to my right hon. leader that parliament has the right to review the action of its officer and that parliament has the right to remedy wrongs committed by that officer.

I was referring to the question of the time not being ripe for dealing with this matter. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre pointed out that the hon. member whose seat is called in question could not take any part in these proceedings. I think he is enjoying them. He was enjoying them this afternoon; he was in the House at the time

[Sir Henry Drayton.]

the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre interfered in his behalf. He is present now. When I was interrupted I was pointing out what is the vital thing having regard to the one point really made by the Minister of Customs and Excise, namely, that the time is not ripe for action on the part of this House to rectify the wrong. Why not? We have this petition filed on the 26th day of February against the return of the hon. gentleman. It was filed not by the petitioner or by a supporter of the petitioner, but by the petitioner's political opponent. The petitioner had nothing to do with it. It was filed on behalf of those who were interested in the crimes committed by Robb. We have this anomaly, that the reason why no action can be taken is because the real beneficiaries of Robb's crimes have lodged that petition! I wonder if it is possible for anyone to consider seriously the suggestion that nothing can be done now because the beneficiaries of this man's crimes have lodged a petition? If they are to be kept in charge of the proceedings in this way, it is a sorry day for justice.

I am aware of the provisions in the Elections Act as to other interests coming in and taking part in the proceedings. I am also aware how absolutely unworkable those things are. I have had to do with election petitions, and I know it is hard enough to fight election petitions when one has the right of way let alone having to carry on a three-cornered fight with a plaintiff in the position of sticking you in the back whenever he gets the chance.

How far have we got? We have reached the point that a political opponent has become useful to the government; that he has supported the government on every single vote prior to the 26th of February; that he was appointed on February 5 to the Customs inquiry committee on which this government's future depends; that he is being looked after by the government, while at the same time, on paper, supporters of this government are attacking the seat. Why? So that the hands of this House may be stayed, so that effect may be given to the argument made by the Minister of Customs and Excise. We have the right to correct wrongs committed by our servants; we have the right to discipline our officers. But, forsooth, we cannot do so as long as that petition stands. The government will hold the support of the hon. member for the session.

You, Mr. Speaker, are familiar with the election law, just as, I am sure, members of