

tional method of procedure. I know there are circumstances under which closure may be justified, but they are very rare in our parliamentary history. The very fact that we have in our rules a system of closure tends to prevent obstruction, and it is a rare occasion when the Government is justified in using the machinery that it provides. It is a good thing to have the strength of a lion; it is not a good thing to use that strength frequently. I do not think that the circumstances justified the application of closure to this Bill. This Bill had been before the House in the form of a resolution for a very brief discussion, and when it took the shape of a Bill and came before the Committee of the Whole, it was taken up on a Wednesday; it was debated on Wednesday and Thursday, and on Friday the Minister of the Interior (Mr. Meighen) gave notice of closure, which took effect at the next sitting of the House. It was a short time to allow for the discussion of one of the most important Bills of the session. We have not been in a hurry about other legislation. We spent a month, less two days, in the discussion of the Address, a matter of importance, I grant you, but after all, a matter of form. There are Bills on the Order Paper that have been there for five or six weeks. There is no rush about them. We have been leisurely discussing the Immigration Act, a very serious matter, I acknowledge, but we are still slowly getting along with it. We have been, in an equally leisurely manner, discussing the Bankruptcy Act and there is no rush about it. Why then at a time when, although we seem to be busily occupied, when it is common rumour in many quarters not unfriendly to the Government, that the business is not being hurried but that the Government are really marking time and waiting for the Prime Minister to come home, should it have been necessary to apply closure in the case of this Bill? I do not think any good reason was given. That is the first handicap.

The second handicap is the effort to associate with public ownership the disregard of all the safeguards which have been established by the wisdom of parliamentarians in the years gone by. We are asked to associate with public ownership this disregard of a principle, which is not calculated to commend the system to the minds of thoughtful men. I have said that this Bill proposes to disregard the essential principle of the parliamentary control of public finance. There is no question but that the control of the public purse is the first and greatest duty of the House of Com-

[Mr. Fielding.]

mons, and when we depart from that we are certainly taking a very grave step. When we are doing it in this case, and conveying to the public the idea that we must disregard all those safeguards in order to apply public ownership, we are not giving public ownership a fair chance. Instead of advancing public ownership by those methods, I am inclined to think that the members of the Government are rather giving the principle of public ownership a black eye.

This principle of parliamentary control of public moneys is, as I have said, a very vital principle in our system of government. It ought not to be necessary to argue that question at all. But, Sir, since hon. gentlemen have introduced this Bill and since they have, as I say, disregarded all those principles, I think I would be justified in calling the attention of the House to one or two authorities in point, a thing which ought not to be necessary, but the presence of this Bill makes it so. Sir Erskine May, page 56, says:—

The most important power vested in any branch of the legislature is the right of voting money for the exigencies of the public service. The exercise of this right by the Commons is practically a law for the annual meeting of Parliament for redress of grievances; and it may also be said to give to the Commons the chief authority in the state. In all countries the public purse is one of the main instruments of political power; but with the complicated relations of finance and public credit in England, the power of giving or withholding the supplies at pleasure is one of absolute supremacy.

That power of the House of Commons of absolute supremacy over public money is to be disregarded and set aside by the Bill which is now before us. Section 16 to which I take exception reads:—

Notwithstanding anything in the Government Railways Act or the Consolidated Revenue and Audit Act, all expenses incurred in connection with the operation or management of the Canadian Government Railways, under the provisions of this Act, shall be paid out of the receipts and revenues of the Canadian Government Railways. In the event of a deficit occurring at any time during any fiscal year the amount of such deficit shall from time to time be payable by the Minister of Finance out of any unappropriated moneys in the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada, the amounts paid by the said minister under this section to be included in the Estimates submitted to Parliament at its first session following the close of such fiscal year; and in the event of a surplus existing at the close of any fiscal year such surplus shall be paid into the said fund.

Now, Sir, that presents this situation to us: That while as respects every other branch of the public service of Canada the