

Mr. STEVENS: And I claim the right to scrutinize them.

Mr. DUNNING: Quite right.

Mr. STEVENS: And it paid this country to scrutinize the Petersen contract and other matters. The minister knows perfectly well that the government is frequently subjected to pressure that is very difficult to resist. No one is impugning his personal honesty, but while he may desire to go along a certain path it may be difficult to resist the pressure. One of the uses of an opposition is to keep the government on the straight and narrow path. Very often the government will say to importunate followers, "We will have difficulty in getting through with this in the House." I am fortifying the minister with some propositions which might help him to resist the importunities of his friends.

Mr. BENNETT: I think the observation of the minister that criticism of a public measure made by the opposition in the House involves a criticism of the minister in charge, is not well founded.

Mr. DUNNING: I did not intend that.

Mr. BENNETT: I do not think he intended to state it in those terms, but it was open to no other construction. He spoke about his common honesty and decency. Surely no gentleman charged with the responsibility of a minister in the House of Commons of Canada would for a moment assert that criticism of a measure by His Majesty's opposition in any sense involves a reflection on the personal honesty of the minister in charge, whether it be common honesty or decency or otherwise. I am sure the minister will agree with that. There is reason why the opposition should criticize legislation introduced by the government in the form of proposed statutes. Does the minister recall that in the income tax measure brought into the House within the last fifteen months there was a retroactive provision that quietly disappeared? Does he realize that we are not all fools, and that if we are to make it our business to investigate and criticize business introduced by the minister we are doing it in the public interest? Is the assertion that those who sit to the left of the Speaker, and spend their time night and day in studying legislation from an intelligent standpoint, should be held to be casting reflections on the minister when they criticize such legislation when it is being considered by the House? The reason that the gentlemen sitting to the left of the Speaker discuss

proposed legislation is that it is their duty to do so in the public interest, just as the Liberal party similarly situated would do. As my hon. friend from Vancouver Centre has properly pointed out, in this country and in every country where democratic conditions prevail that is the course to be pursued. In Pennsylvania last fall, in Ohio and in Illinois, conditions prevailed with respect to elections, and those conditions prevail not only in United States but in other countries. They have prevailed in this country, and reflections such as those made by my hon. friend with respect to those who in the public interest criticize legislation of this character are not well made. I feel sure that in the heat of the moment the minister made his statement a little stronger than he meant to make it. His observations meant only one thing; that criticism of the minister's proposals means distrust and allegations of dishonesty against such minister.

Mr. DUNNING: No.

Mr. BENNETT: I do not think the minister intended it, but as he stated it, it is open only to that construction.

Mr. DUNNING: No, it was not intended in that way. Following assurances made by me and repeated by the Minister of Trade and Commerce that tenders would be called, my hon. friend from Vancouver Centre intimates that I am creating in advance an alibi for what he says is an endeavour to put through a contract as a special favour. I consider that if I did that it would be dishonest on my part as a minister. If in calling for public tenders I permitted some of my officers to give information as to what others were bidding it would be dishonest on my part, and I resent the suggestion.

Mr. BENNETT: I am glad to hear the statement by my hon. friend, and I think he means it. Those of us who are familiar with the history of Canada will know that that is just what was done in connection with the alienation of a considerable part of our western Canadian resources.

Mr. DUNNING: I do not think there is a man on this side or on the opposite side of the House who would be guilty of doing what the hon. gentleman suggested I was doing.

Mr. BENNETT: The Solicitor General apparently wants to say something.

Mr. CANNON: We are discussing a ship-building proposition, and perhaps that is why we are allowed to go adrift.