

*Withholding of Grain Payments*

With the support of a majority of members it would be possible for a cabinet to suspend the sitting of Parliament, have the minority members arrested, withdraw the safeguards of liberty such as habeas corpus—

**Mr. Jamieson:** Aha!

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** My friends behind me are objecting, Mr. Speaker. They think I am putting ideas in the heads opposite but they are already there.

**Mr. Baldwin:** They will say it is apprehended insurrection.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):**

—and freedom of speech, and to establish virtually a dictatorship. All this, too, could be done within the law. It is surprising how few members of the general public appreciate how uncontrolled the cabinet is where it has the support of a loyal majority in Parliament and that “the supremacy of Parliament” in this sense is absolute and subject to no real safeguards of any kind.

I am not yet persuaded that this government is going to go that far, that it is going to put minority members in jail—

**Mr. Jamieson:** It is just too kind.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):**—that it is going to suspend habeas corpus, that it is going to establish an outright dictatorship. But, Mr. Speaker, that is the direction in which any government goes which says, “We have the support of the majority, we can do anything”. That is what the government is saying by what it is doing, and I believe this Parliament should have a chance to debate this issue.

That is why I believe that Your Honour owes it to Parliament to find a way whereby at an early date we can debate the motion that is on the order paper in the name of my hon. friend from Peace River.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière):** Mr. Speaker, we have just heard the substantiated and well-prepared statement of the member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) who has finally convinced a greater number of members to support him. We have also heard the answer of the President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) who has found it lengthy and boring. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, we often find tedious the criticism of an opponent.

The basic question is as follows: Has there really been a misdemeanour against Parliament committed by a minister or a group of them? The basic question boils down to that and I will not repeat it. We want to know whether some individuals or some ministers have complied with the legislation passed by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, indeed the parliamentary process is quite simple. The government, enjoying its parliamentary majority, introduces a bill which, through the Chair, is brought for first reading and this House must decide. It is then brought for second reading and again this House must decide. And as long as Parliament has not passed that bill, through majority or with unanimous consent, it has not become a statute.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if that principle holds true in the positive process of passing laws, so it does as far as the

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

negative process is concerned, which means that from the moment when a law is passed, Parliament, the government and all other persons must comply with it.

Mr. Speaker, if Parliament works for many months, in the light of long considerations, discussions, numerous committee hearings, so as to pass a law, thus requiring an expenditure of public monies, and if one, two, three or a group of ministers decide, for political or other reasons, not to comply with the said law, this means that all the work done by Parliament has been to no avail. The authority of Parliament has been flouted and the government has just gone its own way.

• (3:10 p.m.)

That would also mean that there is a sort of parallel power—a phrase for which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has a special fondness—that is that, on the one hand, Parliament talks on uselessly and, on the other hand, the government makes unilateral decisions. That would surely show great arrogance.

As private members and a minority group, we must protest strongly against this way of besmirching Parliament. In our view, there has truly been contempt of Parliament, because some ministers have not abided by an act voted by Parliament.

Secondly, the President of the Privy Council claims—and that constitutes his whole argument—that the impeachment procedure was not well defined, that it was not explained by the member for Peace River and that, consequently, the motion of the member is not valid because it is not serious. Why? Merely because the impeachment procedure, according to the President of the Privy Council, is not well defined.

But, Mr. Speaker, is that the question? If Parliament is a supreme institution, it is not a question of deciding what means should be taken but, as the member for Winnipeg-North-Centre (Mr. Knowles) said, in view of the supremacy of Parliament, a question of a debate being held that the House might decide whether there has been misdemeanour or not and, according to the decision rendered, that action might be taken.

Mr. Speaker, Citation 113 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms provides as follows:

A question of privilege ought—

And this is what greatly bothers the Chair every day—  
—rarely to come up in Parliament. It should be dealt with by a motion giving the House power to impose a reparation or apply a remedy. There are privileges of the House as well as of members individually.

Mr. Speaker, I fully recognize that the House is wasting a lot of time because of pointless questions of privilege. However in this particular case today, this is not a question of privilege concerning an individual member but the House of Commons as a whole because the matter involves the privileges of hon. members.

Before closing, I would like to recall Citation 107 at page 97 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, and I quote:

Whatever matter arises concerning either House of Parliament, ought to be discussed and adjudged in that House to which it relates, and not elsewhere.