

House of Commons Procedures

it looks. We all remember what happened during those 60 days of decision. How they can sit there and smile now, I do not know.

Why does the Opposition press this issue so strongly? It is because two years have shown the present Government to be most fallible. Thus, no matter what measures it puts forward the Opposition must look at them most carefully to save Canada from falling a victim to the Government's stupidity. The Government has proved itself to be accident prone. The proof is to be found in the legislative record. In these circumstances the Opposition has a special duty to look closely at every item of legislation. All the many hours we have spent—I was going to say "wasted" but that is the wrong word—debating Government business in this House have been well spent. Why has there been this strong and persistent Opposition to the Government? It may, of course, be because we are "agin" them. It may be that we are expressing opinions which are strongly voiced in certain areas of Canada. Many matters have come forward. I remember the vicious fights that arose over the 11 per cent sales tax. The Opposition fought and the Government retreated.

We reminded the Government of the promise they had made to increase the old age pension by \$10. Leaders of the party opposite backtracked. Then, I suppose, their public relations men told them: You had better pay that \$10. And who paid that \$10 in the end? Look at your last income tax return. Ask your accountant if there has been an increase in taxes. You will find that you paid it.

The Prime Minister said the Government should be prepared to bring this measure before the House and stand or fall by it. But it appears to me that once again the brass and the grass are too far apart. I quote from the *Globe and Mail* an article which appeared on April 7, 1965, written by Fraser Robertson. This screed is very pertinent to the present debate. I do not have time to read it all but this is what it says in part:

They may even be correct and hopeful of proving that the Government is foolishly idealistic in a competitive world and in respect to an economy that is as open to world influences as is the Canadian economy. But businessmen should ask themselves how far they have got in recent years by putting before Governments what they believed to be unassailable arguments based upon knowledge and experience.

The article goes on to say they got nowhere. The pension plan and a few other measures are mentioned. When one considers this record

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I begin to wonder whether the Government pays any attention to what goes on outside its ivory tower or listens to anyone except its top level advisers. I wonder whether they pay attention to anyone else in Canada at all.

Mr. Nesbitt: Just Tom Kent.

Mr. Pugh: He is a high-salaried man and he ought to know. But the Government has not listened to the businessmen at all. It has not listened to the economists. The Prime Minister has expressed solicitude for the backbenchers. If these proposals come into effect, the bell will toll and toll for them. In other words, all Members will become trained seals. If we say these proposals amount to interference with the rights of individual Members we must ask ourselves: What is interference? A definition must be given. I say that if a backbencher cannot tell his story at all times, expressing the feelings of his constituents as well as his own reaction to legislation, his liberty in this House is being interfered with.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Nugent) made a good speech this afternoon. He pointed out that the Opposition must have certain rights in this House and that one of the most important of these and one which must be respected is the right to bring down the Government. He mentioned the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin) and one or two others who were in Opposition from 1957 on. This is the attitude they took and these are the speeches they made. Was there any limitation on talk when the present Government was in Opposition? I would point out that in the spring of 1962, 27½ days were taken on supplementary estimates alone. Twenty-seven and a half days, Mr. Speaker—count them up; it is a long story. The Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hellyer) was here then and you can look at the record of how many times he and one or two others stood on their feet and asked questions of the Minister of National Defence, and so on. They said, "I just don't understand what you are trying to tell me", etc. It was a horrible mess. You were here, Mr. Speaker, you know precisely what I am driving at.

With regard to this backbencher business I would like to indicate what would happen if we had a time limit of 30 minutes for the question period on orders of the day. There is no question about exactly what would happen. Today we had a very concrete example.