

principle at stake which concerns the very moral fibre of the country itself, that is, the right of any group of individuals acting as the government of a country or province to arrogate to itself a decision to act against the law. I think this debate may well prove to be one of the most important, if not the most important, to have been held in this chamber for many years, because it deals with a question of fundamental principle. We know that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has not a great deal of respect for the institution of Parliament. He has already indicated clearly both inside and outside the House that he regards much if not all of what happens here as either a nuisance or a bore. Some of us have been deeply offended, and by "some of us" I do not mean just the members of this House but the people of this country. They have been deeply offended by that attitude particularly on the part of one with such a high place of responsibility. But because this is a democracy we have had to tolerate that point of view. It seems now that the government has made a new departure for not only does it consider Parliament to be a nuisance and a bore but it considers itself to be above the law and this is something which members of this House totally refuse to accept.

The government may be fabricating some new morality. It may be simply willing to overlook facts in favour of its own priorities, whatever that may mean, but the fact is that there is a clear-cut statute which pertains to the administration of money with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board in this instance.

Members of this House and many members of the public, particularly those directly affected, will not overlook or accept the government's action in this regard. This government may be more interested in its own plans and policies than in the people involved in agriculture or the principle at stake, but the reason we are having this debate is to point up the fact that a country cannot long tolerate that kind of arrogance and repudiation of the basic structure on which democracy exists.

I trust that after tonight's debate in this House hundreds of thousands of people in this country will let the government know where they stand, because only through the free voice of the people can we continue to maintain respect for democratic institutions and the function of laws which protect both liberties and opportunities in a free society.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, it is not often that the Parliament of Canada remains in session after midnight and it has been my experience that on the occasions it has occurred a fundamental issue has been involved. I have discovered during the course of the discussions on those occasions that members make statements of basic importance to the well-being of this institution of Parliament. All hon. members will agree that the speech made tonight by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) was that kind of statement.

I could not help but make a mental note of the contrast between the reaction of members of the House to the speech of the hon. member for Hillsborough and the

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speech of the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. The minister had a great gallery behind him—all farmers from Montreal, Toronto and places of that nature! There was a lot of hooting and hollering because the minister's speech was full of sound and fury, signifying nothing and quite irrelevant to the essence of this debate. The speech of the hon. member for Hillsborough did not cause a vociferous response from the bleachers. Instead, a profound hush and silence descended over the House. I think the measure of its importance was in terms of what is sometimes called a pregnant silence.

Over the years I have had the privilege of sitting in this place during post-midnight debates. My mind goes back to the first occasion I experienced an extended debate on an issue of this kind. The issue concerned the breaking of the law by a minister of the Crown. That minister was a member of a former Liberal administration that had been in power far too long for its own good as well as for the good of the country. I am sure that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), who is following this debate very closely tonight, will recall the circumstances.

● (12:30 a.m.)

The minister concerned failed to discharge his obligation under the law of Canada. Nothing happened until the official, the civil servant, who was responsible resigned in protest. Then, the cat was out of the bag and debate began in this House of Commons. I was a new Member of Parliament trying to become accustomed to the mysteries of this august chamber, and I can still remember the speech of burning and righteous indignation given by a Presbyterian Scot—I do not think that Presbyterians have any monopoly on speeches of burning and righteous indignation—the late Alistair Stewart who was then representing the constituency of Winnipeg North.

One of his ringing phrases still remains indelibly imprinted on my mind. The occasion was just before Christmas of 1951 and he said that he did not know whether the minister would be spending Christmas in the bosom of his family or in the bowels of a penitentiary. As it happened, the minister spent Christmas in the bosom of his family rather than in the bowels of a penitentiary, but the issue was fundamentally the same as this. The minister concerned was one of some considerable political experience in the public life of this country and perhaps, under those circumstances, a little bit of arrogance has to be tolerated.

The intolerable part of the issue now before the House is that we have a minister who is responsible for the Wheat Board deliberately circumventing the law of the country and justifying it with a speech that was quite specious in nature and content; a minister who has been in public life only since 1968. I would say the present Liberal administration is taking on the attributes of arrogance that brought on its downfall in 1957 much too soon for its own good.