

Sir THOMAS WHITE: The closure is not an unusual thing in British Parliaments, although in this House, I grant, that it may be somewhat unusual.

Mr. BUREAU: It is not unusual in connection with Canadian Northern Railway legislation.

Sir THOMAS WHITE: In the British House it is the usual mode of carrying on the business of Parliament. The hon. member for Shelburne and Queen's (Mr. Fielding) has stated that a month was taken up by the debate on the Address. Now, so far as the Government is concerned, we do not regard that as a waste of time. For the last four years, the business of administration has had the right of way in this Parliament, and the members from the different sections of the country have had comparatively little to say; not because they did not have much to say with regard to the needs of their various sections, but owing to the demands of the war and the exigencies of the situation, Government business naturally had practically a monopoly of the time of the House. That was true of the British Parliament as well. But when the war was over, it was highly desirable that hon. members should to the extent they desired have opportunity to express their views and those of the people of the different sections from which they come with regard to the public questions of the day. And one of the most useful debates we have in this House, one of the most useful in its effects upon public opinion in this country, was the debate upon the Address, which lasted some three or four weeks. There is a function of Parliament apart from the function of despatching legislation before it, and that is the function of expressing what the people throughout the country are thinking about. If you have debates in Parliament and free expression of opinion here, you are not likely to have turbulent expression of opinion outside, because the people read what their representatives are saying in Parliament and are content with the expression of their views there. Many evils in the state are avoided by free discussion by members in the House of Commons of the questions in which their various sections of the country are interested.

Before leaving the question of closure, let me say that my hon. friend the leader of the Opposition showed—I shall not say an eleventh-hour repentance, but a two-o'clock-in-the-morning repentance on the

question of public ownership. At two minutes after two in the morning he said: After all, we on this side are not opposed to public ownership. That is one of the good results that followed from the application of the closure. My hon. friend (Mr. Fielding) has said that public ownership starts handicapped by the fact that closure was applied. Now it is very important that public ownership should start with the sanction of the leader of the Opposition, and one of the good effects of closure was that at two minutes after two in the morning the hon. leader of the Opposition informed the House that after all said and done the Opposition had not been opposing the principle of public ownership. So the application of closure was not altogether an evil as suggested by the hon. member, because when closure was applied the leader of the Opposition and most hon. members opposite were most anxious to impress the House and the country that in reality, notwithstanding what they had said, they were really public ownership men.

And as to statements which had been made previously by hon. gentlemen opposite on the question of public ownership when it was not an issue, in order that there may be no doubt where hon. gentlemen opposite stood on this question, I am going to read a few extracts from Hansard. I find that my hon. friend the leader of the Opposition (Mr. McKenzie) said in 1916 (Hansard, p. 3989):

As to the nationalization of railways I am opposed to it. I believe that we should encourage individual energy, enterprise and initiative instead of putting everything into a common pool, which tends to kill individual enterprise. We should take a leaf out of the book of the United States where there has been little nationalization.

That was his attitude in 1916. In 1917 he said (Hansard, p. 4039-40):

I have been watching this proposition since he (Sir Thomas) introduced legislation last year for the purpose of appointing the Commission whose report we heard read in part to-day. When that resolution was proposed I said to the minister that if he wanted my opinion it was against the public ownership of railways. I did not expect my opinion to have any weight with the minister at that time. But, I am still of the same opinion that the public ownership of railways, generally speaking, is not a good thing for this country. I say that more particularly with respect to the developing of a country such as the Northwest is. If the people of the West will trust themselves as far as spreading out of the branches of any Government owned railway is concerned to Government ownership, they will find it will be a failure.