

Business of the House

basically, is to say to the opposition, you shall not be allowed to perform the duties with which, by long tradition of this house, you have been charged.

I want to read, as I say, very briefly, from Jennings' work on parliament. It refers, Mr. Speaker, to what we all recognize, that this system which we have inherited and made our own would never work without a certain amount of what may be described as team play, a certain amount of the sense of fair play and co-operation between the government and opposition. We see it continually. It is continually in existence in this house, and I am only sorry that today, not on the motion of the government but on the motion of those we usually expect to take a very different view, it is called into question. One of the things we remember is that it is only by good sense and good judgment that minorities can discharge their duties. We have the right of closure in this house, but it has not been used for many years. It is a proper right. If and when it is used, the government takes the responsibility for using it, and no one could cavil at that.

As I say, I want to read briefly from this book. On page 506 it says:

Legal devices are not and cannot be enough.

On the next page it says:

The whole constitutional machine, is, however, impregnated with the principles of democratic parliamentary government. At the peak stands His Majesty's opposition—

I think that what the writer means by that is merely that His Majesty's opposition is representative of minority rights and the protection of minorities, I take it, is the great crowning glory of our system of government.

At the peak stands His Majesty's opposition, ready and able to pounce upon injustice and oppression even more readily than upon defects of policy. In that it does not stand alone, for the government not only does not dare but does not want to act oppressively.

There is a statement as to what parliament has as its basis. We can say quite frankly that in general that is true. We can also say very frankly that when we think it is forgotten it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to object.

Then later on the same page the writer says:

There is nothing whatever in the constitutional machinery that prevents an opposition from being suppressed.

In other words, a majority is a majority. There is closure in the house, and they can suppress. We know that is not the practice. Ordinarily the practice is that these ample powers given to us under the rules are respected.

[Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood).]

I continue my quotation:

Nor is there anything effective to prevent the power of the opposition from being completely destroyed by the destruction of free elections.

That statement is no doubt true, but we never think about that possibility.

The opposition cannot outvote the majority. It can only carry out Canning's threat to defy it and appeal to the people.

Then again the writer says:

The checks and balances are mutually interdependent. One alone cannot be overthrown, and so long as they remain, it is the function of the opposition not only to see that they operate but also to prevent gradual and insidious encroachments.

I suggest to any fair-minded man in this house that what is employed in the motion made here is a gradual—it is not so gradual, either—and insidious encroachment.

Again I quote from Jennings' book:

For, in truth, the whole system is a free system, impregnated with ideas which are the product of centuries of constitutional development, and dependent in the last analysis on the will of the people to be free.

I should like to add a word or two and to ask why, after many occasions—let us state very frankly many occasions when the government has been fully playing the game with this constitutional principle upon which we base our way of life—is this time being selected as the time when the opposition is accused of being unreasonable? It has already been pointed out in answer to the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Low), and judging by a simple test of arithmetic, that we have not taken a fraction of the time, in proportion to the representation in the house, as was taken by the Social Credit group in a courageous manner years ago. What is there that has happened that this matter needs to be dealt with in this way? Why can we not proceed in an orderly manner? Is this measure so vital, so important, so urgent that it is a matter of life and death? Nobody states that.

I am not going to go over the ground which has been adequately covered, but I do want to point out what was said in this house last night by the member for St. John's West (Mr. Browne). He challenged the members of the government, challenged the whole house in fact, by asking whether we could stand cross examination or any kind of examination of the evidence which was given before the combines committee. The criticisms which have been made of the committee I share. I was reading the proceedings again last night, and I was astonished at many of the things I found.

Mr. Speaker: Order.