

National Defence Act Amendment

into it so long as you do it objectively. I would like some of the hon. members who this afternoon, sneered at some on this side of the house who spoke from the heart, although perhaps a little heatedly, to go down to our constituencies, mix with the people there, and find out what these people think. Let them do that, before they come to the conclusion that because of some magic, since they happened to get elected with a minority government, in some way this gives them a divine power to be dictators for the next four years or for the life of this parliament.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Democracy, in its proper sense, is not that sort of thing. Democracy is the temporary placing in the hands of those who acquire the confidence of the Canadian people the responsibility of carrying on government for a limited period of time, not just in the interest of those who support them but in the interest of all Canadians, paying proper attention, in proper balance, to the rights and aspirations of all Canadians. A dictatorship of a majority as Burke said—and I do not quote him verbatim—is no more righteous than a dictatorship of princes.

I would commend to hon. members that they read citation 18 on page 16 of Beauchesne's fourth edition of parliamentary rules and forms and citation 67 commencing on page 54. I think they are both particularly applicable to this situation. I shall quote only part of citation 67:

A minority party may question ministers, may criticize but cannot control in the ordinary case a government with a reasonably large majority. There can be no control of the executive where the supporters in parliament are prepared without question to obey the leaders of their party—through the whips. All that the minority party—the opposition—can do without support from members of the majority party is to question, inquire and criticize, but whilst this does not amount to control it is an important method of checking abuses of power.

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 and freedom of speech, and to establish virtually a dictatorship.

The point is that in our system of government there is no magic power that protects the electorate against the folly of a government if they wish to indulge in such folly. Care must be taken by the electorate when they do the electing, because once they elect a majority in parliament, that majority is all-powerful until the next election.

[Mr. MacLean (Queens).]

The only thing that keeps our democracy alive is the intangible sense of decency, honour and respect for the rights of others and a sense of tolerance among those people who form the majority. This is why I have objected most strenuously to this bill. I have done it, not with any thought of political advantage. I feel aggrieved when we are accused by the minister of holding up the passage of this bill, when he himself has refused to pay any attention to the representations that have been made with the deepest sincerity by hon. members in this and other sections of the house. The minister has brushed aside the advice of loyal, conscientious Canadians who happen to be serving officers and who have given their lives to a military career and the service of their country.

I think that when the minister accuses us of holding up this legislation and messing up the program of the government, he is akin to Kaiser Wilhelm accusing the Belgians of being perverse because they loused up his program to be in Paris before Christmas of 1914. When it is a question of what you believe to be right, objectively defended, you must let the chips fall where they may. It is under those terms that I have taken part in this debate.

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Chairman, in the few minutes left to me I should like to make a few remarks concerning the advantage or disadvantage of abolishing the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the R.C.A.F. If the government and the Minister of National Defence had decided that the present army, air force and naval services and units, particularly the traditional and long standing units, were to be wiped out and completely abolished, I would have thought it would have been suggested that new units should be established to take their place.

Competition is involved in this question. Hon. members have spoken about morale in the services. This involves the question of competition, not only in the military area but in every facet of the life of man. The spice of life is competition, to be just a little better than someone else. That is the reason for living of most people. If you take this competition away from the armed services, if you take away their right to compete in military as well as non-military activities, I think you take away the life and soul of the armed services. Nothing is being substituted for the units that are now in existence. We are going to have a faceless, grey—or green—group of