

*Post Office Act*

I believe that the printed word is still the main medium of communication in this country. Newspapers and other responsible sources of information in the nation claim that under the terms of the bill as it stands now many newspapers cannot survive. We have seen how in recent years independently owned newspapers have gone out of business one by one until, in order to survive, the newspaper industry in Canada has come under the control of large syndicates. I am sure that the drastic and sudden increase in rates, coupled with the attempt of the government to do in one, fell stroke what it has neglected to do in recent years to adjust costs of post office operations, will have a further deleterious effect on the survival of some independent newspapers in Canada.

The other day I asked the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) if he plans to move against monopolies in mass media electronic communication. He indicated that this was the government's intention and that an announcement would be forthcoming in due course. Yet the government is introducing a policy that is bound to bring about a further monopolistic situation in the newspaper industry. Some newspapers which are economically marginal in their operations have candidly admitted that they cannot survive in the face of this drastic and sudden increase in costs.

To ensure the survival of parliamentary democracy in Canada I appeal to the minister to follow the precedents which have been established in recent years for intelligent discussion and to have this matter referred to a parliamentary committee before second reading. This parliament has been in session for about a month and I have listened already to many instant experts on parliament who decry any waste of time. They have been here for about a month and they say that any discussion in this house is a waste of time. The impression they leave is that it would be much better to allow the cabinet to decide because the cabinet knows best.

● (4:00 p.m.)

We are facing a generation of instant experts. I think the best definition of an expert I have come across in recent times goes something like this: "X", an unknown quantity, and "spurt", a drip under pressure. One cannot appraise the value of the institution of parliament by an exposure of one or two weeks to this high court of public opinion. This is the place where we endeavor to

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

achieve consensus by discussion. This is the last hope of redress of wrongs, of justice for the citizens of Canada. We have no ombudsman, and if we are ever to bring about a just society it can only be done by recognizing the vital principle of parliamentary democracy—executive responsibility of the elected representatives.

A few minutes ago we heard in this house an exchange between the first minister of the crown and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) who is a recognized expert—and I use the word "expert" in the best sense of the term—on the principles and practices of our parliamentary system. I was distressed to hear the Prime Minister, who after all is only a peer among equals in our parliamentary system, indicate that he is practising a system of selective attendance for members of the cabinet because he believes they could use their time much better in the offices of the bureaucrats than listening to the representations made in this house by the representatives of the people. This is the sort of trend we must avoid in this parliament. In the last month the trend has increased to an alarming extent and I hope that the Postmaster General, who has had experience in legislatures in other parts of Canada, will accept the recommendation broadly supported by members of the opposition and, I am sure, supported by his own friends, particularly the committee of 35, that this matter be referred to a committee.

It is true enough that the parliament of Canada has more and more business to get through in this complex age. But this still does not lessen the importance of parliament as the ultimate sounding board for all government policy. When the first minister says he has decided that his cabinet colleagues can more effectively discharge their responsibilities by hobnobbing with the bureaucrats rather than with elected representatives, it is time to review our values and the emphasis we place on priorities.

Ministers are also members of parliament. Under our regulations, if they do not attend the house I suppose they will lose their per diem allowances in due course, as would the rest of us in the case of non-attendance. We are all aware that because of the growing complexity of business in the past few years power is moving from this place to the offices of the bureaucrats.

Let me repeat, in conclusion, that if we are to make this parliament effective, if we are to