

I would ask the Prime Minister if this has any wider range than simply taking up the present rules and revising them. Does it go so far as to inquire into the making of any improvements with reference to the work of the committees of the House, as to their number, and the like of that? An intimation made by the Prime Minister some time ago when another question was being debated here would lead me to think he had that in view. I wish at this stage to say, that whilst I have no objection to any elimination of what is useless in the House, any abbreviation of what now may be somewhat too lengthy, I for one have no idea at all of submitting without protest to any of the well defined liberties of this House as a parliamentary body being infringed upon.

It is a pleasure to be able to point out now that the stand then taken by Mr. Foster is the stand taken by the Opposition in this House to-day. The gallant Minister of Militia spoke on that occasion also. He has on many occasions addressed remarks to this House with no uncertain sound, and in the last Parliament when in opposition he did not always toe the line laid down by party whips, and sometimes he expressed independence. On this question he spoke with deliberation and in a manner which would lead us to hope that to-day he may retrace the step he has taken with his colleagues. The hon. member for Victoria and Haliburton (Mr. Hughes), speaking in that debate, said:

It is true that on going into Committee of Supply every member may raise any subject in order and discuss it. But going into Committee of Supply is a very irregular procedure. So far as I am concerned, I heartily concur in all that has been said as to the necessity of preserving liberty of debate in this House, and I would impress upon that committee the view I hold, at all events, and I think it is in the interest of parliamentary procedure and of the country at large, that there should be an opportunity on any occasion, even though the House be not going into Committee of Supply, to discuss freely matters relevant and important to the country. I trust that in revising the rules there will be no attempt to curtail the liberty of debate, or to hamper members from expressing in a proper manner the views they may wish to utter concerning the welfare of the country.

There is no ambiguity in that language. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I may be allowed to cite the statement which you made on that occasion, and in my opinion it stands to your credit. You said, Sir, in speaking in that debate:

Mr. Sproule: Rumours have been prevalent for some time past in the Government press that the Government intended to revise the rules of the House at an early date, and to introduce what is known as the closure. I would like to ask the First Minister if that is the intention in this revision of the rules. I would like to say that so far as I can judge the temper of parliamentarians

generally, they regard the freedom of debate as one of the dearest rights of, the representatives of the people, and if any attempt is made under the guise of amending the rules to prevent the freest discussion of all public questions, I can only say that in my judgment the Government will invite a good deal of trouble.

To the questions put by the hon. member for East Grey (Mr. Sprule), the Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Premier, used these words which are to the point:

Sir Wilfrid Laurier: I can assure my hon. friend (Mr. Sproule) that the Government has no intention of using the majority now supporting it in this House to curtail any of the rights and privileges of members of this Parliament. We prize them as highly on this side as hon. gentlemen do on the other side. I propose that the rules of the House be referred to this committee in order to have a discussion upon them, particularly by those minds in the House who I think are the most entitled by their long experience to give a practical opinion. If it had been the intention to introduce at once what my hon. friend calls curtailment of the privileges of parliament, we might have done it as it has been done in England, though I do not think it was a curtailment of the privileges of Parliament. There is such a thing as abusing the privilege of debate, as there is of abusing everything else. In asking for a committee of this kind, we want to have a discussion on the subject with a view to arriving at a unanimous conclusion on such matters as we can, though there may be some other matters as to which we may not agree. But when we come to the discussion of the report of the committee, it will be time enough for the House to make up its mind.

On the 25th of April the committee reported to the House, the proposals were discussed, and concurred in Committee of the Whole. On the 29th of April the present leader of the Opposition moved that the report of the Committee of the Whole be adopted and that the resolutions come into effect at the next following session. The reason for that was that it was near the end of a session and the Prime Minister had no intention of changing the rules for the balance of the session. That was the last occasion on which the House was called on to revise its rules.

To show the importance that must be attached to the rules of Parliament, Bourinot refers us to Hearn's Parliamentary Government of England, and I would once more impress on hon. gentlemen the importance of considering this question from a non-partisan standpoint as showing the great importance that hon. members must attach to the observance of the rules and to the framing of the rules which are the only safeguard the public and the minority have. Under the heading 'Checks upon Parliament,' Hearn says, at page 555:

The utility of Parliament depends upon the freedom of its action and the genuine ex-