

THE SENATE

Tuesday, September 15, 1992

The Senate met at 2 p.m., the Acting Speaker in the Chair. Prayers.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

THE LATE HONOURABLE BRUCE HUTCHISON, P.C.

TRIBUTES

Hon. Richard J. Doyle: Honourable senators, Bruce Hutchison, Companion of the Order of Canada and dean of Canadian journalists, died yesterday. We owe him our attention and our thanks.

Back in 1943, when he was 42 years old, the up and coming West Coast reporter wrote these words:

No one knows my country, neither the stranger nor its own sons. My country is hidden in the dark and teeming brain of youth upon the eve of its manhood. My country has not found itself nor felt its power nor learned its true place. It is all visions and doubts and hopes and dreams. It is strength and weakness, despair and joy, and the wild confusions and restless strivings of a boy who has passed his boyhood but is not yet a man.

When I first came across Hutchison's book, I was far from home in an RCAF barracks. I had just travelled twice across this unknown country and, almost at a sitting, I devoured all 318 pages that led to journey's end at Kispiox, where Chief Solomon Nalth welcomed the traveller in a shower of white feathers from the breast of an eagle.

Here was a writer, said I, who knew what was he talking about. Much more important, here was a writer who knew what I, the reader, was thinking about.

Whether he was telling us why Mackenzie King admired Adolf Hitler, or why Mike Pearson disliked Pierre Trudeau, Hutchison caught your eye, informed your curiosity, and, for the most part, left the judgment to you. On paper, it seems a simple formula. In fact, it is an almost forgotten art.

That his greatest successes—both in the newspapers he wrote for or edited and in the books that excited so many readers—that his greatest successes were judged to be eminently fair accounts of the business at hand is, in itself, remarkable; for Hutchison came to prominence in an era when, instead of a personal bias, a reporter was expected to reflect the affiliation of the paper he worked for. It was not an illogical arrangement in those days, when most Canadian cities were served by two or more newspapers each with firm political ties. How Hutchison served as a soldier in Lester Pearson's army in the opposition is recounted in *The Far Side*

of the Street, an autobiography of exceptional charm and candour.

Leap back to the day in 1957 when Pearson dropped his "bombshell" in the Commons. "Mr. Diefenbaker", says Mike, "should resign and permit the experienced Liberals to return to government." "Even the press gallery laughed", says Hutchison, as he joins Blair Fraser to rescue the leader's ego in a dreary CBC studio.

I have known people who have argued mightily with Bruce Hutchison. As an editor I had the temerity to do so myself. I have never known a dissenter who was not better off for the exercise and more circumspect the next time round.

Hutchison's book, *The Unknown Country*, won the Governor General's Literary Award for Creative Non-fiction. Two more awards from Rideau Hall have followed.

From his home in Victoria, he quite successfully edited the *Vancouver Sun* without bothering to commute. It was there, on his beloved island, that the prizes and citations piled up. There, at the age of 90, he published his first novel.

I began this tribute to a great Canadian journalist with a quotation from *The Unknown Country*. I close with lines the *Vancouver Sun* first printed in 1945 when Hutchison was 44, lines that were even more pertinent and important when he died at 91 yesterday.

I quote from Hutchison:

Many people accept the label and the slogan of democracy, but a very large number refuse to accept its full implications—namely, that the public must be free to do absolutely what it pleases, by majority vote, at any time.

That is, when you come to think about it, a very staggering theory. It is confined to a small part of the world, the few democracies, and it has existed for a couple of generations at most . . . Yet this is the logical and inevitable end of the system of government we have been developing. We have, in fact, gambled everything on the vast unknown and unknowable swarm of men and women who make up the nation.

That gamble has been taken and we cannot withdraw from it. But, if we are to trust the public, surely the first job of a democracy is to educate the public, both in the schools and in their adult years; and if they are to be educated, surely the first things they must have are the facts; and those who suppress the facts, in the government, in the courts or in the press, imagining that they are saving the state from the people, are denying the whole system . . . It is when they suppress in the name of democracy that they become dangerous.