

Morality in Government

pathetic—to stand in this house and defend the reputation of the Prime Minister of this country. Why should he feel it necessary to do that? It was because the reputation of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) is under attack. I refer not just to the amendment moved by the hon. member for Royal; one has only to pick up newspapers in any centre of this country at the present time and read the editorial pages to realize that the Prime Minister of Canada, the first citizen of this country, is under attack.

The Prime Minister is not the only public man whose reputation has been called into question. He is not the only man who is under criticism and attack. There are other members of parliament on both the government and the opposition sides of the house whose reputations have been seriously damaged by recent events, by allegations, by stories in the press and so forth. I suggest that right here, in the fact that public men are being attacked, that politics has become a game of trying to destroy the other person, is precisely what is wrong with parliament.

I hear an interjection from over there. I think someone said: "Who started it?" I have my own view, but I do not intend to state it. I think we are only compounding the illness if we keep asking the question: Who started it? The fact is that for a long time politics in this country has consisted in an effort to win elections and gain power by destroying the character and reputation of persons on the other side of the house.

If I talk about the two main parties in this chamber someone might well say: That is fine; you are speaking from the vantage point of not yet being one of the major parties. But I do so in the light of the facts of the situation. It cannot be denied that an effort has been made from one side of the house to win political advantage by linking the other side with organized crime.

An hon. Member: They were.

Mr. Knowles: Someone says: "They were". That does not matter any more. What matters is what this game is doing to Canada. The other side comes back and says, in effect: Whatever you say about us, you yourselves are engaged in various forms of immorality.

These things have their effect. I say to hon. members in each of the old parties that if they wish to play the game of destroying members on the other side they can do it, and they can succeed. The tragedy is that a great deal of success has already been achieved.

[Mr. Knowles.]

But the process of seeking to destroy members of parliament, whether on the front benches or the back benches, for the sake of gaining political advantage does something further: It destroys parliament itself. This, I suggest, is what is wrong with parliament. This is our malaise. Instead of being engaged in combat over issues and principles, we are engaged in this effort at mutual destruction as a substitute for politics as politics ought to be. We must see an end to this kind of thing in the parliament of Canada.

One of my colleagues, when he knew I intended to speak, urged me to be sure to suggest to the House of Commons that the country wants us to get on with the business of the nation. I agree. I can tell my hon. friend I was going to say that.

But, Mr. Speaker, we cannot get on with the business of the house just by the way we order our procedures, or what items we consider next, or by agreeing, for example, that we should not have had this particular two-day debate. We cannot get the business of this country done as long as this poison stays here—as long as the means of winning out over the other side consists mainly of destroying persons on the opposite side of the house.

I hope members of parliament are listening to the commentaries on radio and television. I hope they are reading the editorials and the letters which constituents are sending. I hope we all realize there is a sickness here. I still believe in parliament. I believe we shall survive this sickness and come out of it stronger than ever. But in order to do this we must call a halt to this abuse of politics, this practice of each side trying to destroy the other and, in particular, of individuals trying to destroy individuals on the other side of the house.

This is what the amendment now before us is about. It is really just a symptom of what is going on. The reference in the amendment is to a course of action which has apparently been followed on the government side of the house; it has not been denied. But we know that on the opposition side of the house, too, certain practices have been followed. When people accept the destruction of the other party as a means of action, the ultimate way of doing that is by character assassination, accusing people of being linked with crime or immorality, or anything else, so as to get them out of the way.

● (8:50 p.m.)

This is not parliament at its best. This is not parliament as we should like it to be in