

where conditions are rapidly changing, and it is quite conceivable that before many years have elapsed we may have sitting on the ministerial benches of this parliament instead of a Conservative government, that is supposed to be the guardian of all Conservative action, let us say a Socialist administration of an extreme type. Let us assume that the ministry of that day, confronted with a period of depression, decides to obtain power to secure from parliament, at a single stroke, all that it may wish to have for purposes of public expenditure on relief and social services of one kind or another, also authority to enact whatever laws it desires, quite irrespective of parliament. Where would such a ministry find precedent for such action? It would find it in the methods of hon. gentlemen opposite, find it in the action they are taking to-day.

Mr. BURY: May I ask a question?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I do not wish to be interrupted. It would appeal to the records of this house, to what took place in the parliament of Canada during the month of March and on April 1, 1932, and it would find there that despite a vigorous opposition by those who sought to protect the very foundations on which parliamentary government rests, and to preserve the constitution and all that the constitution stands for, the Conservative government of this day had established the precedent that a ministry may, by use of closure, secure to itself power to obtain from the public treasury whatever sum of money it wishes, naming no amount, and take to itself unlimited authority in the matter of legislation by order in council.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that establishing a precedent of the kind is a pretty serious situation, and I cannot understand how any hon. member of this parliament who takes his duties seriously and who regards himself as a guardian of the liberties of the people, can lend himself to action of the kind. That is the real significance of this whole debate. It is not a question of the voting of relief, as I have already said; that we have all been agreed upon from the beginning. But what those of us on this side have strenuously opposed is the sanctioning of a course which torpedoes all that there is in the way of established parliamentary practice and procedure, and submarines the very constitution of our country. That is the significance of the fight we have put up here and I say, Mr. Speaker, that we would be unworthy of our positions as members of this house if, recognizing the danger in the form in which I have presented

it this afternoon, we did not exhaust every possible means to prevent the enactment of any measure that would establish a precedent of the kind.

Now may I give a further reason why it is important that we resist to the nth degree. Hon. gentlemen opposite have been citing, as one of the reasons why they should have the right to introduce this enactment this session, the legislation that was passed last session. They say, "There is the statute of last year, and all we are asking is that we reenact what was done last year." Hon. gentlemen know very well that last year we put up as strong an opposition as we possibly could to the measure then introduced. We pointed out its arbitrary features; we pointed out its revolutionary features, but at that time there was existent, considering the period of the year when the measure was brought in, what to all intents and purposes was closure. The bill was not brought in until the month of July, after a very long session of parliament, and members could not be kept together in this house for a prolonged struggle, with the conditions that then existed. So we had to content ourselves with placing our position on record, but in doing so we in no way acquiesced in the legislation that was going through. Indeed, we did not cease our opposition until the Prime Minister gave parliament the solemn undertaking that the measure then before the house would be amended in committee so that instead of expiring on March 31 it would expire on March 1, thereby assuring to the House of Commons, when it assembled this year, full opportunity to pass a new measure which in no way would usurp its rights while parliament was in session as the measure of 1931 did, for the period when parliament was not in session.

So I say that, having had repeatedly drawn to our attention the fact that whatever is done at one session is going to be made a precedent for what may be done at another session, we have had no alternative but to continue our opposition to the present measure until the government, by the drastic action it has taken, made perfectly clear to the country that even if they had to go the length of coercion and use a weapon with which to defeat those who were fighting for the maintenance of free institutions, they were determined to use that weapon as often as might be necessary to accomplish their ends. For that reason, and that reason only, have we ceased even for a moment our opposition to the two objectionable features of this measure to which I have referred.