

to whether or not the government was seeking to effect economies. Yet before the estimates are brought down; before, under our parliamentary procedure, the government had had any opportunity to lay before hon. members of the House a statement of what its expenditures were likely to be, hon. members were asked, through the amendment introduced, to express themselves in a manner which seemed to imply that the government had not been doing its utmost in the matter of effecting economies.

Take the other resolution that was moved. At the time of the presentation of that motion hon. members were not aware of what the government's policy in respect to trade matters was likely to be. They were informed in the Address that certain trade conventions which had been adopted would be presented to parliament, and it was to be assumed that those treaties would have some relation to questions of trade and duties. More than that, it is known by everyone that there is a time particularly set apart for the discussion of matters pertaining to tariff, and that is when the budget is brought down. Why, then, should a debate be precipitated on tariff matters before parliament has before it in the regular way the information which it ought to have in passing upon a matter of the kind? Furthermore, it is open to any hon. member, when the House is being moved into committee of supply, to introduce a resolution to discuss the various subjects to which I have referred. If the question were one of taking away the right of hon. members of the House to a full expression of their views on all matters, I would support my hon. friend in any measure which would increase the freedom of debate. But where our procedure affords ample opportunity to hon. members on appropriate occasions to bring to the attention of the House and of the country matters of great public concern, then I think we are wiser to pause and endeavour to discover the reasons which have made our parliamentary practice what it is, before introducing innovations which tend to strike at the very heart of ministerial responsibility.

May I say a further word, Mr. Speaker, in regard to what my hon. friend has said on the subject of party caucuses? Here again we notice a tendency which has become all too prevalent in recent years, that of finding fault with old customs and methods of doing public business. The caucus in the minds of some people today is supposed to be a very wicked kind of thing. In some way, it is assumed that,

through this instrument the cabinet can do what it wishes with its followers, but many of those who have been strongest in condemning the party caucus so-called have been among the first, I have noticed, to recognize that they can get nowhere in understanding the views of their own following until they have a caucus themselves and discuss questions before its members.

Now what is a parliamentary caucus, when one comes down to it? It is nothing more than a gathering of a certain number of members of parliament. In a case of a government caucus it is a bringing together of the majority of members in the House of Commons supporting the government. It is the means whereby a government can ascertain through its following what the views and opinions of the public, as represented by the various constituencies may be. It is not a means of over-riding parliament. It is a means of discovering the will of the people through their representatives in a manner which cannot be done under the formal procedure which is required in this chamber. That is what a party caucus amounts to. A government ought to seek continually to give expression to the public will. A government has to be careful in the matter of the legislation it brings into parliament, to be sure that it is in accord with the public will. How can that best be ascertained? Wait until the legislation is brought down in parliament and put on the Table; or by a conference with the government's own following, if there is any doubt one way or the other in regard to any phases of the legislation? After all, what a government has to keep before it, if it is to be worthy of the name of a government, is first of all the support it will receive in the country for the measures it introduces; secondly, the support it will receive in parliament. The government should continually endeavour to bring in legislation which it feels is in accordance with the needs and desires of the people at large, but there may well be occasions where a government may be obliged to have a further conference with its own following to ascertain whether or not the particular views which it is about to present in the form of legislation are to all intents and purposes in accordance with the wishes of the people, as they understand them. That is in the interests of democracy. That is not taking away any rights from the people's representatives in parliament. It is simply coming into closer consultation with the people's representatives in a manner that permits of the greatest freedom of expression on their part.