

Non-Canadian Publications

● (1640)

What the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Cullen) has done and, by his speech, will do in the future is to amend a statute of parliament by a decree outside the statute, a decree made to suit the convenience of the government. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) on Friday, and speakers in this debate today, have made it clear that we are not prepared to let this pass. We are prepared to use every available parliamentary means to ensure, to the extent we possibly can, that we will not allow this to happen. That is why the members who spoke on Friday, and those who spoke on Thursday on amendments to this bill from the government side and who put their partisanship aside and spoke in terms of their conviction—all of them admirable speeches and all well-researched—brought out the points which were separating them from their party, that were separating their positions of principle from a position lacking in principle on the part of their party. I sat in wonder and in admiration and heard them out. I think that these members who have thus far spoken with respect to this bill—and all of them spoke under great strain—are the unsung heroes of this debate. I join with colleagues on all sides of the House in congratulating them for their courage.

That is what has been happening. The Leader of the Opposition on Friday, and again today put the proposition very carefully. I quote from his speech on page 10728 of *Hansard* for February 6, 1976:

Earlier in the week I asked the Secretary of State if he could honestly say that "substantially the same" means the same as "80 per cent the same." I do not know how anyone can argue that such expressions come within the normal use of the English language. How can anyone argue that the interpretation given those words approaches their normal meaning? The interpretation is a complete distortion of the three words "substantially the same". How can one say something must be 20 per cent the same, or 80 per cent different? In other words, the government is changing the statute.

That is the issue. That is, aside from the main objective, not a really bad objective when you look back on the debate and the purpose of Bill C-58 which has now become lost in the shuffling which has gone on. The real issue is the failure to act directly or honestly by coming to parliament with an amendment to the statute. Instead, the government has relied on a procedure which is merely justice depending upon the length of the chancellor's foot, depending upon the whim of the minister, depending upon the clout of the minister within the cabinet and his position from time to time, whoever he might be.

Mr. Speaker, I would not trust my own party with those powers and I'll be damned if I will trust this government with them! It is important that we not succumb, in this House or anywhere else, to the easy compromise which would be to say, "All our prayers have been answered; all our mail has been answered; we can now send out the press release to all the people who wrote to us about *Reader's Digest* and say *Reader's Digest* has been saved." Of course, there is no guarantee of that, if we understood what the minister said this afternoon. But that would be the easy way. It would also be the unprincipled way, because it is precisely why that decision was taken.

Public criticism over *Reader's Digest* could be dampened and turned away, it could be set aside, and every loyal little Grit could send out a statement that *Reader's Digest*

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

had been saved. Well, I do not think it is sure that *Reader's Digest* has been saved. I would be delighted to see it happen, but not at the expense of what is the right and duty of the government in a parliamentary system which is to come before parliament with the changes to its legislation, not with the back-room tinkering which has gone on. I'll wager that some of that back-room is the caucus room of the Liberal party.

Part of it is the difficulty which beset the Minister of National Revenue. Part of it is the problem which overtook the cabinet the moment they departed from principle. Part of the problem is—as Geoffrey Stevens pointed out in his column last week—moving from blunder to blunder in terms of this legislation. I do not believe every backbencher on the government side is a tool of the government. I do not believe they are ciphers. I believe there are more members like the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt), the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Cafik) and the hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Martin) who spoke in this debate. They spoke with courage. But the principle is a clear one.

No member of this parliament representing, as we do, 125,000 people should lie down and tolerate this backroom tinkering, this compromising in an unprincipled way with legislation which may have been founded in the right direction. No member of parliament who respects his position should let it go by. I am very happy to stand with the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) and with others who have spoken in this debate and say that what we are witnessing here is a dark day for parliamentary democracy. If the good word "compromise" is to be derogated in this kind of unprincipled way, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition will do all that they can to prevent it.

● (1650)

The hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) said that the government is changing the law outside the statute. He said we are being governed now by interpretation of a statute by a government whose attitude may change. The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling) spoke of the danger that this action could pose to other forms of the media such as newspapers. We are dealing with a very serious matter. I hope all members of the House will avail themselves of the opportunity of putting in their two-cents' worth on this legislation, even those members of the House who are prepared to take a nationalistic view of Bill C-58 and those who are prepared to say that *Time* and *Reader's Digest* ought to have no privileges whatever in Canada. Even those members ought not to sit back silent while this right of a free people to debate legislative change is being trampled by a government that is doing by regulation what it does not have the guts to do by statute.

That is the issue here, Mr. Speaker. All members of the House who feel strongly about the matter should ask themselves this question: Do we honestly approve, as members of a free parliament, of the government doing an end-run around parliament and taking unto itself the unprincipled use of regulations? Having put itself into a discriminatory position first of all in regard to both *Time* and *Reader's Digest*, considering those two entities together, by virtue of this interpretation, it is now taking a