

CHAPTER FOUR

PARLIAMENT IN WAR

"We shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to ouliver the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do."

WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL, JUNE 4, 1940.

WE have had many trumpety wars in my time—a war in Egypt with the last spectacular cavalry charge at Kassasin—pictured by Caton Woodville; a war in the Sudan, when 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy broke the square'; a war on the North-West Frontier, when a piper played the bagpipes; a war in South Africa, for which we all volunteered, and which we won on paper. All these 'shows' were Victorian, gentlemanly affairs, run on good old-fashioned lines, carried on by 'the Services'. There was some parliamentary opposition to the South African War, and Mr. Lloyd George had to be escorted by the police (allegedly disguised) from a meeting in Birmingham. The premature 'Khaki Election' of 1900 turned mainly on this 'sort of a war' which had then developed, and the election reduced the Liberal Party to insignificance. That war cost two hundred and fifty millions, and we thought we were ruined! We spend that bagatelle every fortnight now. Then, Parliament never got out of its stride, but 1914 and 1939 produced a revolution in parliamentary life and procedure.

CHURCHILL'S REVOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT

One revolution was that Parliament contained a live military genius. Winston Churchill, conscious of, or desiring,

a reincarnation of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, had fought in all the trumpery Victorian wars and some others. He had specialized in military history; he bubbled with initiative; he infected or even inspired Parliament—a dull Parliament which balked at inspiration and rather resented his brains.

Yet Parliament, even in 1914, became under Churchill the core of the War Executive as never before. Within a month this First Lord of the Admiralty was plunging on the land, as well as on the sea, with naval aeroplanes and naval armoured cars; within two months his Naval Brigade marched over Flanders, ill-equipped but vital in the holding of Belgium to the cause. He showered commissions on Members of the House of Commons to lead his amphibian Forces, till the War Office, in sheer self-defence, had to do the same. For the first time Parliament was in the war—with the lime-light flashing on Winston and on all of us. He sent us out to Antwerp, to Gallipoli, to East Africa, to Palestine, as well as to France. Twenty-three Members of Parliament were killed; twice as many more were wounded! We reported to Churchill or to the Prime Minister; we were the British equivalent of Soviet Commissars, using the Press, the platform, the House, and private appreciations—to the rage and despair of all Brassbattery.

Kitchener, like some fish out of water introduced into a cabinet of politicians, sulked in silence, determined not to be committed. The First Sea Lord of the Senior Service kicked with disastrous vigour, till both he and Churchill were out in the cold. It was Admiral Fisher who spoilt the dash for the Dardanelles; though I suppose it was Lord Kitchener who stopped the probably more profitable dash for Alexandretta, and turned it on to the Dardanelles instead. In any case, the old days of the free hand for the fighting

services vanished. Fighting was no longer a mystery reserved for high priests. Parliament was in it all, and knew too much for the survival of any mysteries or illusions.

FRATERNAL UNION

The next noticeable revolution was fraternal Union. Only a month before, the two Parties had been near civil war over Ireland. The Camp at the Curragh had mutinied rather than march against the Ulster Volunteers; Erskine Childers had been running guns into Howth; the Prime Minister had been obliged to take over the War Office; and Liberals were clamouring for the internment of 'Galloper Smith'. Indeed, it was widely supposed that the reports of an aristocratic spy, known in Ireland and at Westminster, had persuaded the Kaiser that Britain was too busily engaged on civil war to care to join in a European scrap. Yet in a trice, with the invasion of Belgium the destiny of counties Fermanagh and Tyrone vanished from politics; and Grey's speech was followed by John Redmond's declaration of Irish support for the common cause. The Conservatives, with lively memories of the South African War, thanked Heaven that a Liberal Government was in power; and a mere handful of Socialists and Radicals formed themselves into a Union of Democratic Control to disagree on principle with the immense majority.

THE IRISH PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

The Irish Parliamentary Party remained loyal to the end, and to their own destruction. Partly this was due to the general feeling that we were fighting for Catholic France and Belgium rather than for British Imperialism. That their support did result in their destruction by Sinn Fein

was largely the fault of the War Office and Lord Kitchener. Had the Irish been allowed to form their own armies, as Redmond wanted, officered by their own people, recruited from Ireland, all the past would have been forgotten. Home Rule would have come with unanimous acclaim at the end of the war, and two allied nations would now stand side by side. But the Army insisted on the old machine, the old regiments, the old flag; recruiting in Ireland had to be for the British Army. Redmond, the old enemy of England, was met by infinite, if civil, obstruction—and saw the ruin of his Party, and his hopes of reconciliation, perish at the hands of fools.

Partly the Irish Party remained helpful because they were Catholic; partly also because, having spent a lifetime with all the rest of us in Parliament in daily friendly intercourse, they were really relieved at being able to adopt an officially friendly attitude. One cannot hate and dine. Yet only while they hated could they hold their electors, to whom they had so long preached hatred. Could they have been granted but one iota of concession to Irish sentiment, to show to the Irish as some recompense for their alliance with the hated British rule, it might have altered all history. So Willie Redmond and Joe Kettle died in vain—went to their death knowing that they had failed. But they did not altogether fail. Had it not been for the gallantry of the Redmonds, the Irish in America would never have permitted the United States to come into the war, even for the sake of France. We have seen in this present war how the Irish—almost the Irish alone—have built up 'America First' and come near to destroying us. Today, with Italy against us, and Pétain-France and Ireland hostile, the Catholic Church balances dislike against expediency as she contemplates the United Nations.

PARLIAMENT BECOMES GOVERNMENT

However, beyond the fact that Parliamentary intercourse brought the Irish into the sacred union of 1914, and effected this revolution of Union, how else did Parliament change in that First War? We then first learnt that Parliament at war becomes itself an Executive Government, that Government means union, that union in war means suppression of the individual. *Inter arma silent leges* (In war justice is dumb), so we resigned ourselves to the equally classical *salus populi suprema lex* (the safety of the State overrules all laws). Parliament normally calls for justice to the individual, and pleads law against bureaucracy. But when Parliament becomes itself the Government, then inevitably its critical functions must decline.

DICTATORSHIP

We have only to suppose that all Members of Parliament become Ministers of the Crown to perceive what must tend to happen. If all were Ministers, each with his own bit of work to do, none could differ from his colleagues on any question and still remain a Minister. He might argue with them in private and in Council, but the majority would decide—or if the issue went to the final authority, the Prime Minister would decide. All would become dependent on and responsible to the Prime Minister, not to their constituents. There could be no open voting, no public discussion, edicts would be issued, unexplained and uncriticized. There could be no remedy for grievances in or through Parliament. The Prime Minister would be an absolute unchecked dictator, with ears open only to such Ministers as he might prefer.

In such a place-man's paradise, democracy finds no place at all, save only indirectly in the creation of the dictator. Publicity and criticism would fall to the Press and the B.B.C. In the interests of the State, publicity and the B.B.C. must require 'guidance'. Thus, if all Members of Parliament become Ministers, we drift into inevitable Fascism under a dictatorship. That happened to some extent in England in the First World War; it progresses more quickly in this war, because the danger is greater. We know that if this country were invaded, all would have something to do and have no time or chance to criticize; we should 'bow to the wicked ten' and pray for their success. Pray also that, like Cincinnatus of old, they should go back to the plough willingly, directly their year of dictatorship was over. Neither Marius nor Sulla were legally, 'dictators'. But Sulla was followed inevitably by Pompey, Caesar and Augustus.

We have no wish to see British democracy die, whether like the Roman or like the Weimer Republic. Yet we approach dictatorship more rapidly in this war than in the last. Let us observe carefully the difference, and as carefully how we can avoid the penalty and recover freedom.

JOINING THE SERVICES

The difference lies in this. In 1939, with the memory of 1914, more Members of Parliament leapt at once into salaried Government jobs; there was less hesitation, and more jobs, particularly civil jobs, available. Mr. Chamberlain, coached by the Civil Servants, who disliked the new competition, discouraged this jumping into jobs. He tried vainly to bar from parliamentary activity all who received commissions or appointments under the Crown not of a parliamentary character. This was, as it were, the dying protest of the War Office, resenting these junior officers

talking direct to the Secretary of State, or expressing publicly views of which their superiors in rank might not approve.

By the time Churchill arrived in May 1940, the Army, Air Force, and Navy were replete with the younger Members of Parliament, introduced under the previous dispensation, and holding their commissions under the implication of silence and discipline. They had ceased to be Members of Parliament, except in name, yet (with a slightly guilty conscience) they were drawing two salaries and earning only one. The Churchillian fighting Member of Parliament of 1914 had been almost instigated to take a larger view of his duties and functions. He was in Army or Navy to see for the Administration and to report fearlessly to Parliament, as well as to take the normal risk of the soldier. Being independent of a military career, he was in a better position to expose any weakness or blundering without personal risk than could be any regular officer dreaming of promotion.

Freddy Guest and Jack Seely, on the Commander-in-Chief's staff in France, were continually on the road between St. Omer and Westminster, between Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister—used by both in their dual capacity as no one else could have been. Passchendaele would never have lasted out those awful months in the mud had two such Members of Parliament been also on Haig's staff in 1917; but dull resentment against all politicians was a prominent feature of Haig's character. French, on the other hand, had always been at one with political aristocrats in Churchill's 'Other Club'.¹

It was thanks largely to the Other Club and Churchill's buoyancy that the fighting Member of Parliament of 1914

¹ Churchill during the last war regularly met several outstanding men of the day to exchange views with them at private meetings. General French and Wedgwood were members of this 'Other Club'. M.S.

was asked in from on top, and not, as in 1939, pushed in from below. In 1914 he was welcomed with respectful awe as ambassador from the great; in 1939 he was regarded with suspicion as a competitor and a spy. That was and is due to the difference in self-confidence and social standing of those who made the infiltrations. What General could resist his host recommending his bosom friend, 'who would keep him in touch with all that mattered in Whitehall'? What General and what mess would willingly receive a Mr. Tankerville Smith, 'who is quite a good fellow and wants a commission'? The former method was that of Churchill in 1914; the latter that of Chamberlain in 1939. No wonder that Lieut. Tankerville Smith, M.P., wondered whether the extra £300 a year was worth his exile among folk who disliked him at Sloccum-on-Sea.

WHAT MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT DID

One sees, of course, little of what the Member of Parliament emissary in the Services does in any war—most must be done behind the scenes in private interviews with authority—and in setting a good example. But let me illustrate from the last war. Godfrey Collins cabled direct from Basra to the Secretary of State for India concerning the muddle in Mesopotamia, evading his military chiefs who were responsible. Aubrey Herbert coolly walked over to the Turkish lines in Gallipoli to have a chat with his friends, committing nobody to anything but establishing doubt as to German reliable friendship. 'Peter' Murray sat behind Lord Reading in our Embassy at Washington, doing personally all the tasks of publicity, propaganda, and press-contact which now occupy some hundred specialists in tact. Leo Amery, carrying despatches, concealed himself and them in a small sail locker, when the ship on which he was sailing the

Mediterranean was searched by the Germans. But as against Amery's exploit must be set the sad disaster to Stanley Wilson. He threw overboard the code keys as the Germans approached, and behold, they floated and were hooked up out of the sea, to the infinite inconvenience of every Secret Service.

I have told¹ how Mark Sykes' knowledge of the Near East was used and abused by the Foreign Office; how Neil Primrose was sent out to govern Palestine and was slain in action at Gaza before reaching the Promised Land; how Francis Maclaren lent his Rolls-Royce unofficially to the General in Flanders on the understanding that he should be the chauffeur. Freddy Guest, with whom I served for a time in East Africa, sent weekly appreciations of the situation, alternatively to Mr. Asquith and to his cousin Winston, put General Smuts into the Other Club and won adequately the D.S.O. and the post of Chief Whip. Jack Seely, evicted from the War Office as a result of the Curragh 'Mutiny', was even more successful. From French's A.D.C., he rose to command, as General of the Canadian Mounted Brigade, and in 1918 initiated with superb audacity the *Grand Pusch Foch* which drove the Germans back from Amiens. For this he won the famous silver cigarette-case, inscribed '*a l'ancien Ministre de Guerre, au brave de la Grande Guerre, au Général Seely, le Général Foch*', which he rightly prized above any decoration. Freddy Hicks-Beach died with Neil Primrose and his Yeomanry at Gaza; but Eddie Winterton survived to decorate Parliament for 40 years. 'Empire Jack' Norton-Griffiths scorched the Roumanian oil wells without authority, and losing his money rowed out alone into the Mediterranean to die. Jim Milner, taken desperately wounded, made the most epic effort to break prison; George

¹ - *Memoirs of a Fighting Life*. Hutchinson, 1940.

Courthope of Rye, wounded in the head, commanding his last hundred Territorials, held the railway triangle at Givenchy by attacking and taking the German front-line trench, in order (as he said) to avoid annihilation from the German barrage on his own trench. 'Wedgy' Benn, preferring to fly over the Mediterranean, declined the post of Chief Whip and £2000 a year.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

The reader will find one of these things in history; but we who knew them know, and know also the secret. They ever had to set a good example, and never needed to wait for orders. On Gallipoli, young Cawley was safe on the Divisional Staff. His men were dying in the front-line trench; so he resigned his staff appointment, went back to his men against orders and was killed next day.

So far those who went out from Parliament in this war have had less chance of adding military lustre to Parliament, though Arnold Wilson had the splendid curtain of death as a rear-gunner of Bomber Command. I am sure the example they have set both in the Services and in civil life has been every bit as good as that of their forerunners; but they have not generally felt the same responsibility to Parliament or been in such close touch with the rulers. The Services have, as it were, inoculated them against 'telling tales out of school'. They have been absorbed into the Service ideas. Those who have instructed the Houses of Parliament have generally resigned from the Services first, so as to be free to report with frankness. Bellenger resigned his captaincy to tell the truth about the retreat to Dunkirk; Sir Roger Keyes has twice resigned for freedom reasons, and achieved respect as well as affection; Commander Bower felt obliged to resign when reproved for writing to the First Lord of the

Admiralty, though that practice was certainly usual in the last war. Alexander,¹ with all his good qualities, is not a Churchill, whom no Service Chief could ever awe or impress. Best, I think, has been Colonel Macnamara, who seems as indifferent to brass hats as he has been to the Party Whips. His criticism is always useful and constructive.

GENTLEMEN OF THE HOME GUARD

Unpaid service in the Home Guard has, of course, absorbed an even larger number of Members of both Houses than has the Army itself—sometimes as privates, sometimes as battalion commanders, and sometimes as Lord Lieutenants of Counties, used on this rare occasion to appoint the officers of the Home Guard in their own country. There being neither a vested interest to preserve nor misfortunes to conceal, the Home Guards are always vocal and generally well served in both Houses of Parliament. We might watch with more jealousy the conversion of the force into a branch of the Regular Army, and the excuse such embodiment provides for ceasing to consider the use and duty of the civilian population—men and women—not yet enrolled in the Guard. But at least it has made Parliament military-minded, and the night-watch has taught us the geography of Westminster. Indeed, the comradeship of the night-watch and fire-watch has extended our Parliament's democracy to all the officials, attendants, and the maintenance staff whom we never knew to exist before. The nightly round, the common task, has furnished all we ought to ask.

It is not, however, the Members who enter the fighting Services, paid or unpaid, that register our drift towards dictatorship. All such Members frequently visit the House. So many were there present in uniform on that great night

¹ A. V. Alexander is First Lord of the Admiralty. M.S.

in May 1940, that they were chiefly responsible for ending the 'phoney war' and nominating Churchill for Prime Minister. The more dangerous innovation is the immense increase in civilian posts of profit under the Crown. The Ministers in the Commons now amount to 76, of whom two are women; and such Minister, even if only Assistant Postmaster-General, may immobilize another Member of Parliament as his P.P.S. No doubt there is work for them all, but that work keeps them in Government offices and away from the comment and fellowship of the House. They shut out of their lives, more than in peacetime, all parliamentary work and all interests outside their own office. The atmosphere they breathe is that of the bureaucracy, not that of the critic. They have become automatons, voting for the Government of their chief.

DIVORCE FROM PARLIAMENT

Normally the desire for re-election and for the desirable advertisement of their activities would modify the M.P.'s divorce from politics—whether P.P.S. or back-bencher. They would be required to speak at least in their constituencies, and therefore to keep touch with general politics. The Party truce has had its effect on all of us, and must necessarily continue till the end of the war. We should, however, recognize that the closure of all political agitation in this war will probably injure the Labour Party just as it did the Liberal Party in the last war. Lifelessness always hits worst that Party which depends on argument and reason. No doubt fear of this fate for the Labour Party influences Mr. Morrison¹ in continuing the suppression of the *Daily Worker*. "If we can't talk, no one shall", seems to be the argument—understandable, but not, I think, patriotic,

¹ Home Secretary.

so long as the Communists can confine their energies to getting 100 per cent efficiency in the workshops. In any case, we may expect more surprises at the next General Election than ever the freaks produced in 1918—the worst Parliament I have ever known.

Nor must I be understood to blame the P.P.S. fraternity for their divorce from politics and Parliament. It is good sobering training for statesmen; only it should not exclude too much. Nor have the best, by any means, deserted the House of Commons. Creech Jones, for instance, tirelessly continues his altruistic work for the coloured races, without any diminution of his service to his chief and sponsor, Ernest Bevin, at the Ministry of Labour.

Add together Ministers, P.P.S.s, Army, Navy and Air Force officers (including Public Relations Officers, as to whose business I am in some doubt), and you take away from the proper complement of Parliament quite half the Membership of the House of Commons.

NEED FOR 'KICKERS'

It is bad for democracy, bad for the House of Commons, bad even for the Government. Place-men are not merely dumb. "How oft the means to do ill deeds make ill deeds done." Ministers, even Prime Ministers, can get their cheers and their majority without the trouble of using reason; worse, they can support incompetent servants by scolding, instead of having the reasonable excuse for liquidation that 'the House won't stand it'. It is too often forgotten that an independent House is the best support for good administration, just because it makes it easier for Ministers to get rid of the incompetent. If for that reason alone courage in 'kickers' should ever be encouraged by the Chair. The Government with an easy life leads ever a bad one. I doubt

whether Mr. Churchill is the better for parliamentary unanimity; it closed, in something approaching disgrace, the careers of his three predecessors. Even if it be true that 'kickers' are usually wrong and often bores, yet the public benefits by hearing and understanding the reasons and arguments against their errors. Abuse is no answer to the public; silence shows not contempt, but stupidity.

Thus even in Parliament many of its democratic virtues go out of it in war. With a Prime Minister and Speaker alive to the losses, some might well be minimized. Members of Parliament of both Houses, especially in the Commons, where they receive salaries, might more often be induced to serve on many of the Civil Commissions, as they do on Public Accounts and National Expenditure Committees without extra pay. It is unseemly that Ambassadors and High Commissioners abroad should continue to draw their House of Commons salaries while absent in addition to their untaxed expenses. The question of double salaries to Members of Parliament in the Services was raised in Parliament in the last war, but was suppressed. I am ashamed to say I was one who drew both salaries, but I could hardly have complained had the House or the Prime Minister wished it otherwise. That is one certain method of reducing the number of place-men. It rests entirely with the Prime Minister, who does not himself draw double pay for his two offices. It would also reduce a certain jealousy of the lucky ones, and promote the feeling of brotherhood which is so good a feature of parliamentary war life.

The Speaker and Chairmen of Committees might minimize the loss to democracy, inevitable in war, if they allowed a little more latitude to individuals who are critical, but often unintelligible from nervousness. 'Rope' is always allowed to *Parties* against the Government—often to their

own damnation. The same latitude, especially at Question time, might, with advantage to the critic and the criticized, be granted to individuals. That it would encourage criticism is not to be deplored in war-time; rather the reverse. Often the crank is a bore, but the House has its remedy: Members can walk out if they are not amused. True, the Speaker and the Minister on the bench cannot, which is just hard luck!

SOLIDARITY OF SENTIMENT

Undoubtedly the pleasantest feature in Parliament at war is the new solidarity. All are affected in like manner by the news—good or bad. We are at once ‘all members one with another’; old jealousies and animosities die a natural death under the new common anxiety. All, socialists and appeasers, are glad to be in this war now; we know now it was not to be avoided; we can’t get out of it; we may have to go on for ever, but it is in good company whether to live or die. Probably we all have our own views for ‘after the war’. But that hardly interests us, so remote does it sound, so inevitable the present.

That is where our new democracy comes in. Once upon a time there were in the House many very rich and many very poor. Between these two varieties of Members of Parliament there was always a sort of discomfort—one stood the drinks, and the other couldn’t; one had his Rolls-Royce, the other walked to the bus—one lived in Grosvenor Square, the other in cheap lodgings in Pimlico. Of course they kept it decently concealed, but such disparity does make it difficult to use the same spectacles. Nowadays, country houses are all let, London houses all bombed, and we live where we can on half our pre-war income. Our wives must manage without servants, and have all learnt to cook and to queue up for prunes or biscuits. Bomb stories are swapped with

gusto between the charlady and the countess. If 'there are no orphans in the Salvation Army', there are certainly no strangers and no class distinctions in the night-watch of the Home Guard—that great brotherhood of the stars.

Such considerations affect the whole nation, but the same equality and fraternity develops more fruitfully inside Parliament. There, a truer democracy than the old has developed—a happy sort of friendship and carelessness. Some have a job and some have not. What does it matter? We shall all start from scratch—after the war. Why? Long before the end of the war we may all be fed, clothed and housed by the State, and grateful for our meals. It is given to few to know the love of those who have gone together through the long valley of the shadow of death, and learnt to trust each other to the end. Personal ambition is beaten out under the hammerstrokes of a common fate, and the same hammer welds happier relationship and prouder duties.

UNDER THE HAMMER OF THOR

Such are the changes which war brings about in the relationship of Members of the House, and upon their efficiency in preserving the virtues of democracy. Less profound are the changes in the externals and procedure of the House. The absence of Party warfare outside has relieved our labours and our purse. Fresh problems have to be met in our minds and in our lives—always a pleasant and invigorating task. Bombed out and servantless, where shall we live? Churchill to be preserved, where and when shall the House meet? Inflation to fear, how shall we tax—and insure for the future? Back in the 7th century, how shall we save the good in civilization?

The bombing we have all solved in our own several ways. More live in London to avoid the discomfort of travel and

to be on hand in emergency, but two rooms take the place of ten. We lunch in the House, even if we do nothing else there. While the *Blitz* was bad, we often met in that most uncomfortable secret house elsewhere, and still meet on days and at times which are never allowed to appear on the Order Paper. That is to prevent Churchill being selected by Hitler as 'target for today'. I remember one terrible afternoon with a raid at Question time, and Churchill sitting impassive waiting to speak, the whole world knowing that he was going to do so. "For God's sake, drop it and go!" I cried across the floor of the House. It made no difference then, but he did tell me in the lobby afterwards that it should not happen again, and that he had arranged for us to meet elsewhere—"but not out of London, mind".

WHERE PARLIAMENT MEETS

Our recent habit, since the burning of the Chamber in May 1941, has been to meet in the re-dressed spacious — The old Chamber has gone for ever, the scene of so many glories and humiliations. And a very good thing too! The Russians drinking the health of the Czar, then smashed the glass that no meaner toast might ever be drunk therefrom. So let the House of Commons' Chamber be smashed that has seen the glories of the defence of London. That Chamber where Macaulay and Bright were heard, where Gladstone and Lloyd George were at home, where Churchill spoke amid the crash of bombs, should properly remain a tradition and a memory. I knew that House for fifty years, exactly half its lifetime, far better than any home, and I could have desired for it no finer curtain.

SECRET SESSIONS

The actual procedure and day-to-day work of Parliament remains much as before. There is no Standing Committee

work, for all Government Bills are dealt with on the floor of the House in the absence of any professional opposition; and private Members' Bills have been suppressed for the duration. Members sit earlier in the day and rise earlier; there are more debates on many aspects of the war, mostly made on a motion 'that the House do now adjourn'. Some of these are now held in secret session, every Member being, not put on his honour, but subject to fine and imprisonment if ought leaks out through him. Such derogatory procedure was not employed in the last war. The Government, or a private Member, 'spied strangers' in the traditional manner, whereupon the galleries and the reporters were cleared out. That was good enough then; no information leaked, Members of Parliament were trusted. Now with much drawing of curtains and guarding of doors an elaborate air of mystery is created; and the Ministers, in either case tell you little or nothing that you did not know before.

Secret sessions are sheer waste of time, because no criticism is listened to and no promise recorded. No permanent officials are allowed to hear what is said; no Minister can say 'I will enquire'. One talks in a vacuum. The House could easily put an end to such farcial debates by all walking out directly the Minister sits down and refusing speech or comments in secret. Then open debate could take place on the adjournment.