

Freedom of Speech

Under party rule, one of the places in Canada where there was probably the least freedom of speech was in the parliament at Ottawa. One of the prominent members, who sat on the Conservative side throughout one parliament, said to a newspaper man that one of the most humiliating incidents in his public career was when his "whip" came to him on a certain occasion, following a deliverance on a Western question, and said: "You shouldn't get up and take a slam at our policy without letting us know beforehand; don't do that sort of thing again."

In those days—~~not~~ so long ago—the party boss rule was all but the absolutely finished product of partisanship.

Talk about the present parliament as people may, the party check reins and the muzzles are not very much in evidence. And Tuesday's debate on the strike is an illustration of the new order of things. The members elected on the same general platform were not in agreement, and they forcefully expressed their views.

In this brief article we are not discussing the merits or otherwise of the various opinions, but simply drawing attention to the satisfactory new order of things under which whips, or cabinet ministers, or party organizers, are not consulted as to what should or should not be said. There is free expression of opinion by the members, without which parliament is not a representative body, and with which all shades of opinion apparently find as free expression as in any other meeting in the land.

This new condition is a welcome advance in our politics. The time may come, indeed, when the practice may prevail of occasionally, when necessary, defeating a government by the votes of independent men in parliament.