

Private Bills—Divorce

This business of investigators taping doors and being invited by the guilty party to come into the room and look for a raincoat, or something of that sort, seems exceedingly fishy to me. Then follows a description of the woman, and Hon. Mr. Howden, a member of the committee, asked this question:

Q. You did not make any attempt to obtain the name of the co-respondent? A. No.

I submit that if this were before a court, if a judge were investigating the case, this evidence would be gone into pretty carefully before a divorce would be granted under such circumstances. I am not criticizing the committee of the other place. All you have to do is look at this list of nearly 150 divorce bills. Today I found that they were dealing with another batch of them; that they are occupied next week with a list. I saw two agendas, one with eight cases on it for one day, another with nine cases for another day. I am told that they have to do from eight to twelve cases a day—with two committees of course. As a rule the committee sits from ten thirty in the morning until one o'clock, but sometimes when particularly difficult cases come along, and there are counsel and witnesses, the cases run over into the afternoon. Sometimes, they are longer than that. The average time I should think would be from twenty-five to thirty-five minutes.

Mr. Winkler: Sometimes they take all day.

Mr. Coldwell: That is what I say, sometimes they take all day. Sometimes they have to go into the afternoon. But where you find from eight to ten cases dealt with, as they are dealt with by the two committees in the morning, it means an average of twenty-five minutes to thirty minutes for each case. By looking at the summary of the evidence that is placed before us in some cases, what happens is quite obvious—again, I want to make it quite clear that I am not blaming the members of the other place. I think probably if we had a committee of this house, with several hundred of these divorce cases, our membership in this house would find it difficult to deal with them and do the other business which is expected of us or that we expect the hon. gentlemen in the other place to do. I want to make it very clear that I am not making that criticism.

All I am saying is this. Whether or not we believe that we should have divorce in this country, we have divorce. I believe the manner in which it is done today is a reflection upon this parliament. It is a burden placed upon this parliament which we, as hon. members, should do our very best to eliminate. I believe the only way that we can rid ourselves of this burden is to make

a protest on every bill that comes before this house from now on. We may have to discuss, as I have been doing for the last few minutes, some of the evidence. I have been told that one of the reasons they are able to get through the number of cases that they do is the fact they often have experienced witnesses in these cases who know exactly what to say and do when they come before the committee. The committee has no means whatever of finding out anything other than what it is told. On this evidence, which looks to me to be rather fishy, you find the dissolution of a marriage. I do not feel, as I have often said, that I wish to be a party to this kind of thing.

Mr. Chairman, contrary to what the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre says, that he thinks this bill should go through, I do not think so. It looks to me as though this is a case where the investigators have been careful to get the evidence, and the man at least has been anxious to provide the evidence. The invitation to enter the room to see if the raincoat was still there is a most unlikely occurrence in my opinion, and that alone is ground for further investigation than we have before us in this particular instance. When this bill comes to a vote, I intend to vote against it. I say to hon. gentlemen that we have perhaps been derelict in our duty, because there are so many other matters of importance to all the people of Canada that we should not spend our time in dealing with matters affecting two people—although I should not say only two people.

As a matter of fact I have read only five cases, and I spent quite a little time in reading those five cases. If we had to read the 130 or 140 cases that are now on the list we would be reading nothing else. Perhaps we shall not be doing anything else from now on in the private members' hours but discussing these particular divorce bills. I said just now that they affect two people. In some cases there are children. So far as I can see no consideration, or very little consideration, has been given to the children, although some of the hon. gentlemen investigating do ask whether the children are being cared for. Although I have not been particularly interested in them, I have seen divorce proceedings reported from the courts in Great Britain, and if my recollection serves me well the children are placed in the hands of one of the parents, usually the innocent party, and recommendations are made for their sustenance and their care.

Mr. Harris (Grey-Bruce): That is true here.

Mr. Coldwell: No.

Mr. Harris (Grey-Bruce): Yes, it is.