

MAY 21, 1940

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Honour the Speaker and the deputy speaker to occupy the Speaker's chair. As a presiding officer, in a temporary capacity and as chairman of standing committees of the house, he earned a high reputation for fairness and a judicial demeanour. We all know in what measure he possesses those qualities of courtesy which are a traditional characteristic of gentlemen of his race. His facility in both of the official languages of the house is a most valuable personal and public asset.

I mention these qualities in order that hon. members on all sides of the house may know in advance why I believe that, if chosen as Deputy Speaker, not only will Mr. Vien do great credit to the position and honour to himself, but as I believe you, sir, as Speaker are doing at the present time, will reflect honour upon the House of Commons itself.

I move, therefore:

That Thomas Vien, Esquire, member for the electoral district of Outremont, be appointed chairman of committees of the whole house.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

PRECEDENCE FOR GOVERNMENT BUSINESS ON AND AFTER WEDNESDAY, MAY 22

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister) moved:

That on and after Wednesday the 22nd May, 1940, to the end of the present session, government notices of motions and government orders shall have precedence at every sitting over all other business except introduction of bills, questions by members and notices of motions for the production of papers.

Mr. T. L. CHURCH (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I do not rise to oppose the motion, but in view of the fact that this is a war session I believe all parties in the house should act as one. In other words it should be our sole purpose to win the war; that should be our main and only business. While there are many domestic questions, in my view they should wait until the war has been won. I do not intend to oppose the motion, but it is my intention to assert the rights of a free parliament and a private member. I do that because under our constitution the private member is the connecting link between the government of the day and the electorate, and when he ceases to function, parliamentary government is at an end.

I hope the motion before us, if adopted, will not prevent criticism. I am not referring to criticism offered merely for the sake of criticizing. All hon. members want to see the government get on with its war work, but

I trust that constructive criticism, or that which is based upon fact, will not be prevented.

Just a year ago we enjoyed the visit of the king and queen, representatives of monarchy. The visit showed the tremendous popularity of the monarchy and the decay and decline of the House of Commons because of the usurpation of the rights and functions of parliament by the executive. In my opinion we should assert the right to free parliaments, free assembly, the freedom of the press and freedom of speech. These conditions should continue, so long as they do not interfere with the prosecution of the war.

We need not be ashamed of the record of private members in the House of Commons. In the last twenty years, while I have been a member of the house, the initiative for forward action has come in a large degree from private members. They have taken the initiative with respect to our national coal supply, rearmament, supporting the war and Great Britain. The war has come so close to us that no doubt the government wants to get along with its programme, and I want, as does the country, action. On the other hand I do not want parliament to become a paradise of inaction, coma and inertia.

The first order under "Notices of Motions" stands in my name, and relates to the advisability of adopting measures for the better protection of soldiers serving in the expeditionary force, with particular reference to the establishment of a system of life insurance for all soldiers. This is not a long motion, and its discussion would not take more than ten minutes. We have insurance on bonds, securities and stocks; why not have it on the men who are overseas fighting our battles for us? The United States had a similar insurance scheme for all its soldiers at the time of the last great war. So had the city of Toronto.

It will be understood of course that I am not now discussing the resolution. Paragraph (b) deals with a transportation allowance for soldiers in Canada. We know the government pays for automobiles for some of its military district officers, and I believe our soldiers are entitled to the consideration I propose. Paragraph (c) of the resolution has to do with the guarding of public property. The last parliament placed responsibility on the municipalities, and the suggestion is that it should be that of the federal authorities.

While I am not opposing the motion I hope that in passing it we will not be turning the House of Commons, this free parliament, into a body of yes-men and noddors. We ought to use great care, because it is yes-men and