

Election of Speaker

Mr. Jerome is particularly well-prepared for the office of Speaker. He has practised law and during the last few years, he has spent a great deal of time looking into delicate social problems in his constituency of Sudbury. Not only has he applied himself to serve his constituents better, but he has also tried to participate more fully in parliamentary life by striving systematically and successfully to learn the official language which was not his mother tongue.

He has acquired the sensitivity, the shrewdness that can be called the sense of Parliament. Indeed, since his election in 1968, he has followed very closely the proceedings of the House. For two years he was Parliamentary Assistant to the President of the Privy Council, the Government House Leader. All hon. members will no doubt agree with me that such an experience is in itself an excellent preparation for the responsibilities of the Chair.

But Mr. Jerome's contribution as Chairman of the Justice Committee was also most remarkable. In that capacity he demonstrated not only his legal expertise and political ability, but also his fair-mindedness in difficult situations, where no partisan pressure could make him alter the decisions he felt were well-founded.

[English]

The Speakership of the chamber is serious business. Naturally, the cornerstone is fair play. But it also requires toughness, equanimity, compassion and the ability to laugh, not just with others, but at oneself. Anyone who has enjoyed the companionship of Mr. Jerome in his years in parliament knows his ability to find a spark of laughter in even the most tense and difficult times.

Mr. Fraser, I frankly look upon this parliament as a challenge and as an opportunity. I have asked my colleague, the leader of the House, to explore realistically with his counterparts in other parties ways in which we can smooth out the procedures of the House of Commons to make them more meaningful both to the members and to the public. I sincerely hope we can work together toward an accommodation. I know there are divisions among us as to the route we should be following. I know that one of them concerns the concept of a permanent Speaker. My objections to the idea are common knowledge and have been for years, and they have been shared by some hon. gentlemen in the opposition. But in the process of studying possible reforms, the government does not have a closed mind on any of them, and these propositions can be discussed in specific ways in the appropriate parliamentary committee.

● (1100)

However, today my thoughts and intentions are directed toward an individual whom I strongly hope all members of the House will support, knowing as we do the strains and challenges that will accompany his acceptance.

Mr. Fraser, it is a privilege for me to move, seconded by the hon. President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) that James Jerome, Esquire, member for the electoral district of Sudbury do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Trudeau.]

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Fraser, at this time I should like to say a few words to the House. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) invited me to second the motion he has just put before the House. I should like to say a few words in explanation of the fact I declined to second the motion. I fully agree with the Prime Minister and other members of the House about the importance of this great office. I have attached great importance to the achievement of what I call, perhaps imprecisely, a permanent Speaker, a Speaker who continues in office regardless of changes of government, a Speaker who is completely free of partisan politics once he is elected to this House by the House.

[Translation]

For this reason, I asked my party's association in the constituency of Stormont-Dundas not to present any candidate against Mr. Lamoureux at the 1968 election. Following his election, I was honoured and pleased to second his appointment.

The agreement concluded with the Stormont-Dundas association was designed to find other means to succeed in appointing a permanent Speaker and it provided the association with the right to choose a candidate in a new election.

[English]

Between the election of 1968 and the election of 1972, the Prime Minister and I had discussions to explore an alternative method of achieving what I had in mind, and what others had in mind, which was a method alternative to that by which the associations in the Speaker's constituency would be denied the right to nominate a candidate. These discussions were not fruitful, much to my regret. Mr. Lamoureux ran in the election of 1972. He was opposed by a candidate from my party. Mr. Lamoureux ran as an independent and was elected. Following the election of 1972, the Prime Minister discussed with me a choice of Speaker and indeed a Deputy Speaker. There was no difficulty and we reached an understanding and agreement. I felt this was a substantial step forward, and compensated in part at least for the earlier failure to agree on a method of securing a permanent Speakership and a method of completely removing the Speaker from partisan politics on his election.

Following the election of July and prior to the calling of this session I read in the press that the Prime Minister would propose Mr. Jerome's name as Speaker; but there was no consultation, no prior knowledge, despite any suggestions in the press to the contrary. There is no need here to go into the details or to take you, Mr. Fraser, or the House through a controversy between the Prime Minister and myself following the announcement of the Prime Minister's intention. There was no consultation. In my judgment, in the absence of such consultation, this was a substantial step backward from the position we had achieved through 1968 and 1972.

Mr. Fraser, I can hardly exaggerate my personal disappointment at this turn of events. In these circumstances, as I told the Prime Minister, I could not second the nomination of Mr. Jerome. Mr. Jerome, of course, will receive the full co-operation of myself and members of my party as he discharges his difficult and very important responsibilities of presiding over this House. I hope, as the