

*Procedure and Organization*

point of order. However, at the same time, whether we like it or not, it is extremely difficult to limit contributions in this kind of debate to the strictly procedural aspects of the matter. It is perhaps natural for hon. members, without wanting to do so, to touch on the substance of the matter. This is what I am afraid of, and I really feel somewhat embarrassed by the thought that this debate might continue until one o'clock tonight always inviting the Chair to make a ruling ultimately at one o'clock. If it is the wish of hon. members I can make a ruling immediately, after which the debate will continue on the motion before the house.

• (6:00 p.m.)

A few days ago the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was kind enough to say that he intended to raise this particular point of order and since then, as I try to do in every such circumstance, I have given serious thought to the points he has raised. I came to the chair armed with many books and precedents from this parliament, from the British parliament, and even from other parliaments. I have Beauchesne, Bourinot, May and the Standing Orders with me, as well as a long prepared opinion which I reached as a result of my studies in the quiet of the Speaker's chambers.

I wonder whether it is necessary to go over the details, the procedural details of the situation. I say, perhaps with a bit of sadness in my heart, that the debate we are having now is, as I said a moment ago, at the expense of the Chair, though no hon. member wants that, neither the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), nor the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) nor any of the others who have taken part in the discussion. But in a situation such as this, which is so close to a partisan situation, I do not see how we could have a debate of this kind without the Speaker being in some way involved in partisan considerations.

What we have, according to my limited comprehension of such matters, is the report of a committee. Some hon. members have said, and no one doubts it, that the report is the report of the majority. At the same time, we do not have in our parliamentary system minority or majority reports; we have the report of a committee which is before the house for adoption or rejection.

What hon. members would like the Chair to do under the provisions of Standing Order 51

[Mr. Speaker.]

is to substitute his judgment for the judgment of certain hon. members. Can I do this in accordance with the traditions of Canada, of Britain and in all parliamentary systems where the Speaker is not the master of the house, in spite of what Standing Order 51 says? The Speaker is a servant of the house. Hon. members may want me to be the master of the house today but tomorrow, when, perhaps in other circumstances I might claim this privilege, they might have a different opinion.

It would make me a hero, I suppose, if I were to adopt the attitude that I could judge political situations such as this and substitute my judgment for that of certain hon. members, either a majority or, perhaps, sometimes a minority. But I do not believe that this is the role of a Speaker under our system. I am not prepared at this time to take this responsibility on my shoulders. I think it is my duty to rule on such matters in accordance with the rules, regulations and Standing Orders which hon. members themselves have turned over to the Speaker to administer.

I have a set of rules, and precedents by which I am guided. I recognize it is my duty to protect the privileges of hon. members and to protect minorities. I have always tried to do this, and I shall continue to do so. But I do not think that in the circumstances I can go so far in abandoning my responsibility as a servant of the house as to be its master and to give a ruling or judgment along the lines suggested by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

I am not saying I accept in any way the procedures which have been followed, though I do not think it is for me to express at this time an opinion in this regard. I would only say that after sincere thoughts on the matter in accordance with my way of looking at the situation I cannot accept the suggestion put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre under the terms of Standing Order 51.

I hope hon. members will realise that this is not an easy decision for the Chair to reach. I hope I shall never be placed in a position again in which I have to make this kind of decision. I count on hon. members on both sides to ensure that the Chair is not again placed in such a position.

It being five minutes past six o'clock, I do now leave the chair.

At six o'clock the house took recess.