

Mr. SPEAKER: The words by which I am guided are 'reflection upon the Chair.' I would be very glad if the incident were not discussed at all. I have tolerated a good deal of what in my judgment is not exactly according to our rules—the reference to and discussion of a previous debate; but, as it is a matter concerning myself, from delicacy I have refrained from interfering.

Mr. NICKLE: I had not the slightest intention of using any words of praise in regard to you, Mr. Speaker; I was simply trying to state the cold truth. If the hon. member for St. John objects to that, I must allow your conduct to speak for itself, and I am quite satisfied that the members of this House feel that no words of mine could add any lustre to the course adopted by you on the night in question.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: As I rise to discuss the matter which has been engaging the attention of the House for several hours, perhaps I may be allowed to say that I will endeavour to review the discussion in as judicial a spirit as possible. The rules of the House are certainly the bulwark of freedom, and it is the interest of every member, whether he sits on one side of the Speaker or on the other, to preserve those rules, whether it be to his immediate gain or to his immediate loss. For, if there is any endeavour by one side of the House to evade the rules, or to abuse them, the party so guilty is sure to prepare for himself whips of scorpions from which he will suffer sooner or later.

At the present time we are engaged in the task of reviewing a decision taken by Mr. Speaker. Let me say at once, Mr. Speaker, that in so doing, in starting the discussion on this side of the House, there is no intention at all to discuss or to reflect upon the motives which guided your conduct. Even although we may differ from you on the course which you took, we fully recognize that, in acting as you did, you had no motive but what was certainly consistent with a proper understanding of your duty as presiding officer of this House. But, Sir, we are all human, and we are all fallible. The rules of the House have been established because we are human and fallible, and in order to guide us, so far as they can guide us, in the many incidents of parliamentary life. You, Sir, are the first commoner of the land, and we are all delighted to bear testimony to the care with which you have discharged your duties. Even though we differ from you, I repeat, it is certainly not from any desire to reflect upon you, but simply to indicate what we think ought to be a proper discharge of the duties with which you are entrusted.

Mr. PUGSLEY

The question which we have to debate and decide at the present time is as to whether Mr. Speaker had the right, when the House was in Committee of the Whole, to interrupt the sittings of the Committee and to take the Chair. A good deal of matter has been brought into the discussion which I think can be brushed aside; it would be better for us to keep to the point immediately at issue. The point at issue, as I understand it, is whether or not Mr. Speaker has the right to interrupt the sittings of the Committee of the Whole and to take the Chair. This is the point on which we on this side of the House take exception. On a certain occasion, that is to say, on Saturday, the 15th of March, when the House was sitting in Committee, Mr. Speaker interrupted the Committee and took the Chair. At that moment, and on the Tuesday following, some members of the House asked Mr. Speaker what his authority was for having taken that course. With all respect, Sir, in order to state the point and to establish the basis of discussion, I may, with your permission, quote the authority which you yourself gave, and in your own words. On Tuesday, March 18, Mr. Speaker said:

Bourinot at page 280 says of the duties of the Speaker:

'Amongst other things he decides only when questions actually arise. If a member wishes to challenge his action or conduct, he must proceed in the usual way, by giving notice of a motion on the subject.'

That finishes the quotation. Then Mr. Speaker went on to say:

The quotation which I gave as to the right of the Speaker to take the Chair is in the English rules, number 161, which reads:

'In the case of grave disorder arising in the House the Speaker may, if he thinks it necessary to do so, adjourn the House without question.'

This has been changed a little. The older wording was:

'—take the Chair at any stage and adjourn the House if necessary.'

Our rule lays down that in case of grave disorder the Speaker's duty is to take the Chair at any time, and if he is unable to get the House under control, to adjourn the House of his own motion.

Mr. Emmerson: What is the number of our rule?

Mr. Speaker: We have no distinct rule.

Mr. Murphy: Did I understand Your Honour to say in answer to the hon. member for Westmorland that we have no rule corresponding to No. 161 of the English rules?

Mr. Speaker: I said no exact rule corresponding to that.

That is the authority which was claimed by Mr. Speaker for taking the course which he did. Now, in the light of discussions which have taken place up to the present time, I think, with all due respect to you, Sir, that the rule which you quoted