

*Election of Speaker*

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Mr. Beauchesne, I should like to say just a word to hon. members before the debate is concluded, first of all to remind them that the house is not yet constituted. In the course of his remarks my right hon. friend (Mr. Bennett) dealt at considerable length with what had taken place in parliament under previous administrations. He referred to discussions that had arisen as to the manner in which the Speaker had performed his duties and mentioned investigations or criticisms that had been made of the way in which the commissioners of internal economy had conducted affairs. All that my right hon. friend said, however, had reference to what had happened after parliament itself had assembled and the House of Commons had been constituted. What I should like to make perfectly clear to hon. members at this stage, is that we are assembled here simply as recently elected members of parliament, and that until a Speaker is chosen the house will not be duly constituted or in a position to conduct proceedings of any kind. Even if I wished to do so, I could not now act in the manner my right hon. friend has suggested I should act, namely give assurances on behalf of the government as to what action will be taken in the House of Commons later on, when it is properly organized.

As all hon. members well know, the practice has been for the Speaker of the House of Commons to continue in office for certain purposes until a new Speaker is chosen.

Mr. BENNETT: It is provided by statute.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes, it is provided by statute. As my right hon. friend well knows, the Speaker who was in office when he was Prime Minister has not been returned as a member of the House of Commons and, so far as I know, has not been in Ottawa since the general election. Had the Speaker been here, it is quite possible that the privileges of the house, which my right hon. friend says have been so much violated, might have been protected to a greater degree than he says they were. I just point out that fact as a circumstance which hon. members might wish to take into account.

I take no exception whatever to the right hon. leader of the opposition and to my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Woodsworth) drawing attention, as they have, to something that occurred before parliament itself met. I would, however, ask hon. members at this time, before voting on the election of the Speaker, not to judge the hon. member whom I have nominated by anything that may have taken place before parliament was in

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

session at all and before he became Speaker, but rather to withhold judgment until he is actually in the chair. May I add that if I had not the utmost confidence in what I believe will be the impartiality and fair play of the gentleman whom I have nominated, I would not for one moment think of urging the house to take action immediately. I have, however, no hesitancy in saying that I believe that, once in the chair, Mr. Casgrain will be a worthy successor to those hon. members who have filled the high office of Speaker with great dignity and impartiality.

Mr. BENNETT: Debate is quite permissible on this matter. In 1852 the debate lasted a very long time, and many members spoke; the same thing occurred in 1895. In view of the observations that have been made by the right hon. Prime Minister I am content that this motion should be carried on division. I thank the right hon. gentleman for the assurance he has given, that notwithstanding the fact that the house is not organized he feels certain that minorities may look for reasonable protection and impartial administration of the rules, written and unwritten, that govern the conduct and decorum of this chamber. That, however, has nothing to do with the breach of the privileges of the house which certainly must be considered by a committee in due course and which I will see is brought to the attention of the house. When the question is put I am content that it should be carried on division, in view of the statement which the right hon. gentleman has, if I may say so, quite properly made to this chamber.

The Clerk of the House declared the motion carried in the affirmative, on division, and Hon. Pierre-François Casgrain, member for the electoral district of Charlevoix-Saguenay, duly elected to the chair of the house.

Hon. Mr. Casgrain was conducted from his seat in the house to the Speaker's chair by Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King and Hon. Ernest Lapointe.

Mr. SPEAKER-ELECT said: Ladies and gentlemen of the House of Commons, it is with a real sense of gratitude that I accept, in all humility, the bestowal of this high honour. Yet, gratitude is here tinged with anxiety. So many distinguished gentlemen have graced this chair that I would falter before the prospect of succeeding them were I not, while truly conscious of my own unworthiness, given assurance by my knowledge of the genuinely fair and considerate attitude of my honourable colleagues in this house.