

CANADA

House of Commons Debates

OFFICIAL REPORT

Thursday, January 7, 1926.

FIRST SESSION—FIFTEENTH PARLIAMENT

This being the day on which parliament is convoked by proclamation of the Governor General for the despatch of business, and the members of the House being assembled:

Arthur Beauchesne, Esquire, B.A., K.C., the Clerk of the House, read to the House a letter from the Governor General's Secretary, informing him that the Chief Justice of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy Governor General, would proceed to the Senate chamber on Thursday, the 7th of January, at 3 p.m., to open the session.

A message was delivered by Major A. R. Thompson, Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, as follows:

Gentlemen of the House of Commons:

His Honour the Deputy of His Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable the Senate.

Accordingly, the House went up to the Senate chamber, when the Speaker of the Senate said:

Honourable Gentlemen of the Senate:

Gentlemen of the House of Commons:

I have it in command to let you know that His Excellency the Governor General does not see fit to declare the causes of his summoning the present Parliament of Canada until the Speaker of the House of Commons shall have been chosen according to law; but to-morrow, at the hour of three o'clock in the afternoon, His Excellency will declare the causes of calling this parliament.

And the members being returned to the Commons chamber:

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

Hon. ERNEST LAPOINTE (Leader of the House): Mr. Beauchesne, we have just been reminded by the representative of His Excellency the Governor General that our first duty as members of the House in a new parliament is to select our presiding officer. It is an important duty, for our selection will influence very largely the character and the tone of the debates during the life of this parliament. Impartiality on the part of the Speaker is the supreme law of his office. It is essential that every member should have the conviction that when our colleague ascends the throne of the Speaker he ceases to be the man of a party and becomes the man of the whole

House. His functions require skill, tact, wisdom, and above all a courteous firmness. He must have a tolerant temper and a cool judgment to deal with the situations which arise when occasionally party spirit and political considerations stir the minds of many members. A vigilant keeper of the prerogatives of the House, he must preside over its deliberations with that calmness which a clear, patriotic vision gives to a good citizen.

We had the good fortune during the last parliament to have as Speaker a gentleman who possessed to a high degree all the qualifications I have just mentioned. The hon. member for Gaspé was indeed the type of an ideal Speaker. His task was at times an arduous one, but his exceptional ability, his personal dignity, his vast and valuable reading, his long years of training in the service of parliament and the country, his kindness and urbanity, his art of reconciling opposite views with tactful shrewdness, achieved wonders and gave him an authority which, indeed, was an asset to the parliamentary life of Canada.

It has not been usual in this country to follow the practice of the British House in appointing the same Speaker in successive parliaments. However, after confederation Hon. James Cockburn held the office during the first parliament which followed confederation until 1872. He was reappointed in 1873, under the government of Sir John Macdonald, and held office during the life of that parliament. In 1917 also, Mr. Speaker Rhodes, who had been appointed to the office during the previous parliament, was given a second term and occupied the chair until the dissolution of that parliament. Various prime ministers, including the late Sir Wilfrid Laurier, often expressed the view that we should adopt in Canada the practice of the British parliament, but, for some reason the change was not made. However, we have thought this an excellent opportunity to adopt, at least for this parliament, the rule which prevails in the Mother Country, because we had as Speaker in the last parliament, as I have already said, a gentleman who enjoys a very high reputation in Canada and whose selection will certainly be commended and approved by the people as a whole. I may add that I believe the appointment of the hon. member for Gaspé, will be a bond of union between the members of this House.