

system is one of the most generous in the world because we have come to the point where the majority is allowed to complain against the minority.

That is just about what I have been given to understand this afternoon by listening to the remarks of the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) and also those of the hon. member who is now the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Ouellet). When the debate was resumed, I would have liked him to continue his remarks because he had made such a good start. We made some very accurate statements and I thought that when this debate would be resumed, he was going to continue making this type of observations.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to refer to certain studies which have been carried out on the role of the private member in parliament. I have here a study which was prepared for hon. members and which is not that old. It dates back to June 1977. In this study the following is said and it is precisely on these points that I would like to draw your attention and the attention of my colleagues, namely the fact that our parliamentary procedure is not just hard and fast but that it can evolve with time according to circumstances and to the needs of this assembly. It is said in that study that historians, legislators and philosophers throughout centuries have sought to determine if the elected representative had first and foremost to be loyal toward his voters, secondly toward his own party, thirdly his country or obey the voice of his own conscience.

Mr. Lapointe: The first point.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): As the member for Charlevoix (Mr. Lapointe) just said it is the first point, that is first to have a conscience. Over that subject we are in agreement. And I can see the hon. member is now retiring, perhaps to proceed with some soul-searching experience of his own.

An hon. Member: He will be back.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Aristotle had something to say on the subject we are debating tonight, and so did Thomas Jefferson and others who tried to clarify the matter. Edmund Burke was probably the most influential British writer and speaker.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, it seems appropriate, since we are considering a very serious matter, to refer to experienced parliamentarians, who may teach us some useful lessons as members of this chamber. This is what Burke had to say in a speech he delivered in 1774 to the electors of Bristol which, I imagine, is a riding in Britain. He speaks of the members' tendency to represent private interests. He reminds his audience that parliament is not, and I quote:

—a convention of ambassadors representing various opposed interests which they must defend against others, as officers and lawyers; rather, parliament is a deliberative assembly which represents the nation and shares the same interest, that of the people; local interest and prejudices should not take precedence over

general welfare and the will of the people. It is true that the man is chosen; but once a member is appointed he ceases to be the representative for Bristol to become a member of parliament.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, as I always understood it members are elected, it is true, by a certain number of electors in a given riding. But once we are here, when we participate in the proceedings of the House we are spokesmen for the whole nation. And as long as these sacred responsibilities of the member are not recognized, whatever his language, his origin or his religion, we shall find it difficult to build a real country where people will live in harmony and have a good life.

Mr. Speaker, in 1867 at the outset of parliament as we know it the rules of the House of Commons of Canada recognized only the right to ask questions in writing. We have made a lot of progress since that time. Members of parliament later agreed to amend the rules so that questions might be put but not only in writing. However at that time rules were very strict. To ask a question to a minister you had to give him a 48 hours' notice and later it was recognized that oral questions might facilitate understanding and be more expeditive. I have been sitting here for many years and I remember that in the beginning the oral question period was reserved for members sitting on your left. It was a practice that opposition members could ask questions to government members on administration, the use of public funds, the policy considered by the government on such or such matter, even on an international matter.

Everybody seemed satisfied but after a certain time members sitting in the back rows, "backbenchers" as we called them—I do not like that word because I think that a member is a representative of the people just as any other whether he sits in the fifth row or the first row. This is my concept of the member of parliament. We should not belittle the members sitting on the fifth, the second or the first row. Everybody cannot sit at the same place. Sir, you are the Speaker in this House. You have assistants but you cannot all sit in the chair at the same time. It is one thing that must be clearly understood.

So, as time went on we have come to amend the standing orders of this House and tonight we are discussing Standing Order 43 which has been amended many times and we have changed the business order. The most recent one is the one we have for the opening of the House, after the members' prayer which I would like the public in our gallery to attend. That will come one day because such wish has been expressed by the House. It is a matter of procedure. Mr. Speaker, you already wrote to me about it and I understand, but the committee on procedure was quite stubborn. It is amazing how long it takes them to reach a decision and spell out a procedure so that the public could follow our first consideration, the prayer to God. In any event, Mr. Speaker, we did unanimously agree that motions under Standing Order 43 should be presented at two o'clock, after the prayer, until 2.15 p.m.