

The Constitution

as most sacred so as to eliminate to the greatest extent possible any possibility of injustice just as were eliminated in the past, through good will, smallpox and the plague. Injustice is debasing just as racism is offensive to human dignity.

An hon. Member: True!

Mr. Tousignant: No economic situation whatsoever, as for the individual the want of a job, his age, the early loss of a loved one or a personal handicap, no event whatsoever can justify that such a thriving nation like Canada will not put all its citizens on an equal footing and act accordingly. It would be unforgivable, Mr. Speaker, not to settle down to this task or, should I say, this noble cause.

An hon. Member: The hon. members opposite do not believe that.

Mr. Tousignant: To recall the words used by the Right Hon. Prime Minister when he was quoting Péguy, those who pride themselves on having clean hands, Mr. Speaker, are those who have no hands.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: How true!

Mr. Tousignant: As far as we are concerned, Mr. Speaker, at least nobody will be able to accuse us of having shirked our responsibilities. We do not hesitate to set our hands to the plough and that is exactly what right-thinking Canadians expect of us.

I am glad to see that the parties in the House have agreed to seek the opinion of the Supreme Court about the legality. Still I deplore the fact that we have to operate against tradition and contrary to our responsibilities. As legislators our role is to enact laws since that is why we exist, and that is precisely why people elect us; the role of the courts is to judge only after the laws have been adopted by Parliament. However, we had to make a few concessions to the Leader of the Opposition. We gracefully accept knowing as we do how clever he is at always flying in the face of common sense.

An hon. Member: His electors will make him grow old.

Mr. Tousignant: In conclusion, as conscientiously and as honestly as I can, I want to pay homage—I think that the people across the aisle ought to listen carefully to these comments. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend several Progressive Conservative and NDP members who, from the outset of the debates, have demonstrated their objectivity and broad-mindedness and who have tackled this issue as intelligent people would.

An hon. Member: There are not many, but there are some.

Mr. Tousignant: There are several.

They are at peace with their conscience and they never did yield to partisan temptation and to chauvinism.

For instance, I have in mind the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie), to name only one, but I could commend several others. They made sound and level-headed interventions and gave us their unrelenting support since the beginning. I want Canadians to know that we have had the support of several Progressive Conservatives and of most NDP members since the debates began. That is not what they would have the members opposite believe, for there are many divisions within that party. From the outset, Mr. Speaker, we have had the support of several Progressive Conservative and NDP members, unrelenting, open and honest support for this project, and their approach has been a precious and priceless contribution to the understanding and enlightenment of the Canada of today, for which we all entertain hopes, and of the Canada of tomorrow for the generations to come. All the great works which remained unpublished are not worth much more than the paper on which they were written. If we are responsible men and women, let us at least have the courage to afford future generations the possibility of judging us.

● (1710)

Mr. Dubois: Mr. Speaker, as—

[*English*]

An hon. Member: What the hell goes on now?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The Chair would like to be informed at this time of one or two things. Perhaps the Chair has been misled—not intentionally, I hope—but I thought there was an understanding when there was a switch a while ago from the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Tousignant) to the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty). I was informed that there was an undertaking by the two major parties that the two following speakers would be Liberals. If I am incorrect, I would like to be corrected by hon. members. I was told there was an agreement to that effect. If not, I will alternate parties, as I am supposed to do.

Mr. Collette: Mr. Speaker, I explained what happened earlier. There was a bit of a mix-up; it does not matter who was at fault, but we allowed the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) to speak even though, following our normal practice of rotation, it was the turn of the hon. member for Témiscamingue, a Liberal. Subsequent to that, I had a conversation with the hon. member for Burlington (Mr. Kempling), the Conservative whip, and I asked if it would be all right if, after the hon. member for Témiscamingue spoke, we could correct the order of rotation by having the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Dubois) speak followed by a Conservative member so that the normal 50-50 ratio would be followed.

That was the understanding I had, and that is what I indicated to Your Honour. That was my understanding; we discussed it.