

Royal Canadian Legion

It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business.

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I am told that after consultation unanimous consent was reached to proceed with Bill S-10 through all stages without debate. If so, then we could proceed with C-233, and I would ask then that the previous bills be allowed to stand with the unanimous consent of the House.

● (1702)

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-10, as I understand it, is in the name of the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) and it involves the Royal Canadian Legion. I am pleased to say that we consent to the procedure as outlined by the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Peters: We are quite pleased to agree with it, but not without debate.

Mr. Francis: In view of the agreement perhaps the hon. member from Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) might make a short statement at the committee stage.

Mr. Peters: I believe we might.

PRIVATE BILLS

[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West) moved that Bill S-10, respecting the Royal Canadian Legion, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Private Bills and Standing Orders.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that that is what the hon. member has in mind. I think that if there is an agreement, it is to pass it and not refer it to the committee, and for this reason I would like to say a few words.

I saw this bill for the first time yesterday. I noted that one of the things being asked for is the inclusion of members other than those initially understood to be eligible for membership in the Canadian Legion. Being a Legion member, and having no other reason, I objected yesterday to that procedure. Since then I have had an opportunity to talk to the Dominion Commander of the Royal Canadian Legion. He indicated to me that he and a lot of other members had the same reservations that I have in not only allowing retired RCMP personnel to be members, but also RCMP who are still in active service.

Normally, Legion members have been retired army veterans, and indeed, that is what the title means. Because of the fortunate circumstance where we have not a war for the last 30 years, it has been obvious—because many of the veterans are getting older—and most of them are my age or more, or at

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner).]

least in their fifties—that membership in the Royal Canadian Legion would run out if it were to depend entirely on veterans. It was decided by the Legion—and it is indicated in the work they have done in the last 20 years in such fields as sports, the training of hockey teams, public speaking debates, community advancement and community assistance—that they would have to take in other members. They originally took in, without any particular objection, sons, daughters, relatives, wives and others closely associated with the veterans, because it was felt that they would carry on the tradition of the Legion. More than that, it would maintain the benefits to older veterans—as a place to go, a place to own, and a place to feel at home with colleagues—in a manner to which they have been accustomed.

Personally, I saw the bringing in of active members of the RCMP, not just retired officers, as something that would change the Legion considerably. I have talked to a number of people and they agree with me. The Legion itself at their last convention had some considerable discussion about this, during which they took into consideration several other facts which were unknown to me and, I suppose to most Legion members.

When the Legion was founded in 1928 they did take in the active members of the RCMP because it was considered a para-military organization, although the impression is that it is less of a para-military organization today than at that time. RCMP officers were brought into the Legion as full members, and this continued until 1948 when they changed from the corporation they had at that time to letters patent. The Dominion President informs me that there was an oversight at that time, and they inadvertently left the RCMP out.

I could say that that would be with some justification, but that probably is not true because I and most other veterans were unaware that they had the right to full membership in the first place. I belong to the Legion, and have done so for many years. I am not particularly active because duties keep me from participating. I am prepared, Mr. Speaker, to accept the decision of the membership of that organization, duly constituted at a convention where this matter was raised to satisfy the problem that they had created of inadvertently removing the RCMP by letters patent to allow the RCMP personnel to become full members again.

I am informed by the Dominion President that the vote was in excess of the two thirds that is necessary to make such a change, and they were instructed by that convention in 1976 to make the change. It is interesting to note that much of the support for the action that they were taking came, I am told, from western Canadians. The RCMP play a much closer role to the average citizen in the small rural communities of western Canada than they do in eastern Canada. The support was very large in western Canada, and they overwhelmingly supported the motion. While I am still not personally convinced that this is the direction in which I would like to see the Legion go, it is the direction which the membership chose.

I am pleased to support the changes introduced by the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) in presenting this bill on behalf of the Legion.