

House of Commons Debates

FIRST SESSION, SIXTH PARLIAMENT.—50 VIC.

THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT of the DOMINION, which had been prorogued from the 2nd day of June, 1886, and thence from time to time, was dissolved by Proclamation on the 15th day of January, 1887, and, Writs having been issued and returned, a new Parliament was summoned to meet for the Despatch of Business, on Wednesday, the 13th day of April, 1887, and did accordingly meet on that day.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

WEDNESDAY, 13th April, 1887.

ON which day, being the first day of the meeting of the First Session of the Sixth Parliament, for the Despatch of Business,—John G. Bourinot, Esquire, Clerk of the House of Commons, Donald William Macdonell, William Wilson, and François Fortunat Rouleau, Esquires, Commissioners appointed by *Dedimus Potestatem* for administering the Oath to Members of the House of Commons, all attending according to their duty;—Richard Pope, Esquire, Clerk of the Crown in Chancery, delivered to the said John G. Bourinot a book containing a list of the names of the Members returned to serve in this Parliament.

The aforesaid Commissioners did administer the Oath to the Members who were present, which being done and the Members having subscribed the Roll containing the Oath, they repaired to their seats.

A Message was delivered by René Edouard Kimber, Esquire, Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod.

Gentlemen,

The Honorable Sir WILLIAM JOHNSTONE RITCHIE, Deputy Governor, desires the immediate attendance of this Honorable House in the Senate Chamber.

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

*Honorable Gentlemen of the Senate, and
Gentlemen of the House of Commons:*

The Honorable Sir WILLIAM JOHNSTONE RITCHIE, Deputy Governor, does not see fit to declare the causes of summoning the present Parliament until a Speaker of the House of Commons shall have been chosen according to law, but to-morrow, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the causes of summoning this Parliament will be declared.

And the House being returned,

ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD, addressing himself to the Clerk, said: Mr. Bourinot, I move that Joseph Alderic Ouimet, Esq., the member representing the Electoral District of Laval, do take the Chair as Speaker of this House. To the old members of Parliament I need say nothing in favor of the selection of Mr. Ouimet. To those who have not sat in Parliament before, I would say that Mr. Ouimet has represented his county without interruption since he was first elected. The people have shown their confidence in him by electing him on five different occasions. He is, therefore, a gentleman of parliamentary experience. He is also an advocate of high standing at

the bar, and one of Her Majesty's counsel. I am sure the House will have great pleasure in accepting this motion which I now make.

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. I second the motion.

Mr. BLAKE. Mr. Bourinot: It is not my intention to oppose the motion. The position which it is proposed that we should fill by our unanimous vote—as I hope it will be—is one of high distinction, a worthy object of honorable ambition to the first men on the floor of this Chamber; and it requires the possession of some distinguished and some rare qualities. It requires a reasonable acquaintance with both official tongues, the power of continuous toil, the rapid comprehension of and familiarity with the rules and customs of Parliament, and the capacity to apply them on the spur of the moment. But it requires even more than these, a somewhat rare combination of qualities—patience and courtesy combined with dignity, firmness and decision, and, most of all, it requires the possession of a judicial spirit, a spirit of justice, and a determination to act justly between the majority and the minority, between friend and foe, between the highest and the humblest person on the floor of the Chamber. In 1878, the hon. gentleman who has just proposed this motion, occupying a position on this side of the House, thus expressed himself with reference to the position of the Speaker:

“The Speaker is chosen to act judicially between the parties. He is to free himself from all political connection, and therefore the rule in England—the wise rule and practice in England—has been, although we unfortunately have not introduced it into this country, and we now see more than ever the disadvantage of not following English precedent, that the Speaker is not to be nominated by a member of the Government.”

The hon. gentleman had had, before he made these observations, two or more opportunities of directing the course of procedure in the election of Speaker, in which he did not follow what he called the wise rule and practice in England that we unfortunately had not introduced into this country. Since moralizing, as we are in the habit of doing in Opposition, on the subject, he has had two more opportunities of restoring and correcting our practice by the practice of the English Parliament. I expected that at this time, perhaps, he would have adopted the views he expressed in 1878; but I observe that, like other great men, he is better at moralizing than at practice. For my part I care little about the form—I care little about the form except as an expression of a principle. It is of little consequence whether a so-called independent member proposes the Speaker, who has been the prior choice of the Administration, or whether that proposal is made by a member of the Government. But I quite agree that, as a symbol of a principle, the form is of importance, and that principle is vital—the principle, namely, of the relation of the Speaker to both sides of the House; in truth, that in order that we should properly do our business it is necessary that the House should have confidence in the impartiality of the Chair. I feel—I have always felt—that it is important that, if it be at all possible, we should avoid division on the selection of the officer who is to fill that delicate relation towards us; and, therefore, I rejoice that the occasion does not at this time arise for any such division. I may be allowed to repeat