

PRIVATE BILLS.

CANADIAN NORTHERN BRANCH LINES COMPANY.

On consideration of an amendment made by the Senate to Bill No. 97, respecting the Canadian Northern Branch Lines Company.—Mr. Sharpe (Lisgar).

Mr. LANCASTER: Hon. gentlemen will find the amendments made by the Senate set forth on page 943 of the Votes and Proceedings. Apparently Their Honours thought that they were accomplishing what we had already accomplished with much less language; but, in my opinion, these amendments fail to accomplish the object of the legislation, and make a complication which I do not think is good legislation at all. I do not want personally to assume the responsibility of moving that the House do not concur in the amendments, but reject them peremptorily. I think a better motion would be that these amendments be referred to the Select Standing Committee on Railways, Canals and Telegraph Lines, for report, and I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Amendments made by the Senate to the following Bills were referred to the Committee on Private Bills:

Bill No. 100, respecting a patent of the Honourable Ambrose D. Richard and others.—Mr. Fowler.

Bill No. 101, respecting patents of Frederick Jacob Newman and others.—Mr. Macdonell.

THE RULES OF THE HOUSE—LIMITATION OF DEBATE.

Consideration of the proposed resolution of Mr. Borden, to amend rule 17 of the House of Commons, and the proposed motion of Mr. Hazen, that this question be now put, resumed from April 14.

Hon. CHARLES MARCIL (Bonaventure): Mr. Speaker, the question now before the House is without doubt one of the most important that has come to the attention of the present Parliament or any previous Parliament since Confederation. It may affect the carrying on of the business of the House for we know not how long. The Prime Minister proposes—and the Minister of Marine and Fisheries has moved the previous question—to amend Rule 17 of the House, which reads as follows:

When two or more members rise to speak, Mr. Speaker calls upon the member who first rose in his place; but a motion may be made that any member who has risen 'be now heard,' or 'do now speak,' which motion shall be forthwith put without debate.

Before referring to the amendments which it is proposed to make to this rule,

I would call the attention of the House to the reference made to it at page 457 of Bourinot, showing the origin of the rule:

The Speaker of the Commons will always give precedence in debate to that member who first catches his eye. Rule 11 provides also for cases where several members rise at the same time.

Rule 11 has now become rule 17.

When two or more members rise to speak, Mr. Speaker calls upon the member who first rose in his place; but a motion may be made that any member who has risen 'be now heard,' or 'do now speak.'

Since Bourinot published his work, the following words have been added to the rule:

Which motion shall be forthwith put without debate.

Bourinot, continuing, says:

It is usual, however, to allow priority to members of the administration who wish to speak and in all important debates it is customary for the Speaker to endeavour to give the preference alternately to the known supporters and opponents of a measure or question; and it is irregular to interfere with the Speaker's call in favour of any other member.

I wish to point out that in this instance the Government has taken the liberty of breaking down all previous precedents. Bourinot, continuing, says:

In the House of Lords, when two rise at the same time, the Chancellor or Chairman of committees has no absolute right to determine the question as to which should address their Lordships. Unless one immediately gives way the House will call upon one of them to speak, and in case of variance of opinion the decision must rest with the House, which may forthwith proceed to vote who shall be heard. The Lord Chancellor is given, by courtesy, precedence over other peers, should he rise to speak at the same time with other members.

The House knows that the member for Quebec East, the right hon. the leader of the Opposition (Sir Wilfrid Laurier), was given the floor by Your Honour, and the Government assumed the responsibility of setting aside the precedent which we find in parliamentary history for the purpose of bringing to a head a project which should never have been brought before the House. It is to my mind the second great mistake that this Government has committed. The first mistake was to deal with a great Imperial question from a party standpoint, and the second was to try to do away with parliamentary procedure, and to have this great measure adopted by the setting aside of all parliamentary rules.

The leader of the Government proposes to add three clauses to rule 17. I need not read them, as they are familiar to mem-