

desirable if we are to preserve the high quality of our judiciary and the public confidence in it which is so vital to our democratic system.

Motion agreed to and bill read the first time.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

ALLEGED TAMPERING WITH WITNESS BY MINISTER—MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 26

Mr. Terence Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the adjournment of the house under standing order no. 26(2) for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the charge that the Minister of National Defence has breached the privileges of this house by tampering with a witness. That charge has been made public and has not been dealt with by this house, therefore resulting in continued injustice until the matter is cleared.

Mr. Speaker: Will the hon. member enlighten the chair on the question of urgency of debate?

Mr. Nugent: With pleasure, Mr. Speaker. The urgency of debate is that the charge which has been made and the facts, if proved, go to the very heart of responsible government. They threaten the very existence, indeed, of much more than the usefulness of parliamentary committees. What is at fault here is the attitude of the minister who says that the government can do what it likes and that parliament is a rubberstamp, whereas the essence of our democratic system of responsible government means that the cabinet is responsible to parliament.

There is a duty on every member of parliament to make sure that neither the government of this country nor any minister of that government preempts the rights, prerogatives and privileges of this house. A minister must make information available to the house, and not hide it. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that making the series of charges public in this house at this time would have such a serious effect on the possibility of the continued existence of the democratic system as certainly to raise grave doubts whether under this government we are now enjoying anything that resembles responsible government.

If the people of this country are to have any confidence in our system of government and in the House of Commons, charges of this nature should not and cannot be allowed to

Motion for Adjournment

stand for a moment without being substantiated or cleared or at the very least investigated. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it is intolerable to allow these charges to stand even for a few minutes. Since these charges go to the very essence of our parliamentary system and our system of responsible government, there can be no more urgent business for the house to consider. I submit that it should be taken up now.

● (3:20 p.m.)

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address you on the question of urgency of debate. In our opinion this is a most urgent matter. A charge has been made—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brewin:—which affects the integrity of the house. A charge has been made, and no doubt will be spread abroad, that a minister has misled the house, that a minister has tampered with evidence given before a committee of the house. I cannot imagine anything that ought to be cleared up quicker, if it can be cleared up. I am not suggesting for a minute that it cannot be. That will be a matter to find out.

I should have thought that the Minister of National Defence himself would be the first to say that this matter should be debated at once.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker, many of the members of the house are earnestly anxious that the committees set up by the house should function effectively and should add to the strength of the parliamentary system.

If it should happen—and I do not suggest it has happened although the charge has been made by a member on his own responsibility who claims he has evidence—that a witness before a committee of the house has been tampered with, has been told to modify or change the evidence that he was presenting to the representatives of the house, then I cannot imagine a matter more urgent for our immediate consideration and I think we should immediately clear it up. For these reasons I support the motion and I urge upon you that it should be debated forthwith and dealt with just as soon as possible.

Mr. Raymond Langlois (Mégantic): Mr. Speaker, I think that after a motion has been presented to the house, with the hon. member moving it taking full responsibility for what