

*Election of Speaker*

with it the highest honour in the gift of this assembly. For that high task the hon. member for St. Mary has been proposed. In expectation of his election I want, on behalf of my associates and myself, to extend our sincere congratulations and best wishes for his successful tenure of office.

In the choice of a presiding officer for the House of Commons there are three essentials we ought never to forget. One is that he is elected by us; another is that he is our officer, and the last is that in no degree is he an officer of the government. In democratic parliaments these facts ought never to be overlooked.

As the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) pointed out, in Westminster special care is taken to protect the independence of that position. As he has explained, private members make the motion appointing him and, we have found that speakers, once appointed have continued from one parliament to the next, even though in the meantime there may have been a change of government. The action of the Labour government in Great Britain within the last few days when they continued in office the Speaker of the previous administration is evidence of that fact.

I draw attention to these facts at this time, not in a spirit of censure of the procedure we are witnessing here to-day. Rather I do so for the purpose of pointing out that the government's action a few days ago—like some similar actions in the past—in designating in advance of the meeting of parliament who would be Speaker of the House of Commons, was not in accordance with the best parliamentary tradition. It was, in fact, and I say this in all deference to the Prime Minister and to such of his predecessors as followed the same procedure, an affront to that tradition; and, to that extent, was an invasion of the rights of the house.

I mention this matter to-day only because if it becomes a regular practice that the Speaker be chosen by the government, without, as in the present instance, any consultation whatsoever with the members of the house, it will tend to prejudice the independence of the office, and to that extent hamper its occupant in the sometimes delicate task of satisfying members of all parties that he is, in fact, completely impartial.

I need scarcely add that this protest is not in any sense directed against the hon. member who has been proposed as Speaker, and in no way detracts from the commendation and good wishes which I express to him personally.

It is one of the happy traditions of the House of Commons that a Speaker of one

parliament who is of English descent shall be followed by a Speaker of French descent, and vice versa. The government's choice is in accordance with that worthy tradition. Furthermore, on grounds of personal merit, I feel it to be a wise one. I believe it will be generally accepted as fortunate that the government's choice has fallen upon the hon. member for St. Mary.

During his period of public service in the house and in the legislature of his native province, the hon. member has demonstrated that he possesses ability and tolerance of a high order. If it be true, as the Prime Minister has said, that the hon. member has in the past been a strong partisan and a doughty fighter for his party, that need not be held to his discredit in his new role.

We on this side of the house are hopeful that, in the tradition of his many distinguished predecessors, the hon. member will be able, as they did, to cast off the mantle of partisanship in the administration of the onerous duties of his new task. We are confident that he will consider himself the guardian of the rights of members wherever they may sit in the house; and we trust that he will be equally zealous in protecting the rights of those who sit in opposition as well as those who sit on the government side.

To the degree that he succeeds in doing this, his administration will be a success and he will be assured from all sides of the house of the respect and deference due his high position.

In assuming the speakership the hon. member for St. Mary will follow a long line of predecessors, whether of Anglo-Saxon or of French descent, who brought distinction to that position. It is our hope and expectation that his record will be no less distinguished than theirs.

For myself and associates I say to the hon. member so soon to be chosen Speaker that he will have our full cooperation in making his term of office a credit both to himself and to the twentieth parliament now about to open.

Mr. M. J. COLDWELL (Rosetown-Biggart): Doctor Beauchesne, on behalf of one of the numerically smaller parties in the house, I wish to support the nomination of the hon. member for St. Mary (Mr. Fauteux) as Speaker.

Doctor Fauteux came to this house some three years ago in a by-election, and since that time those of us who had come to know him paid respect to him for his views, and for that sense of humour which has been