

Private Bills—Divorce

in which the committee dealt with them at that time. The case now before us was in all probability inquired into with a lot of other cases, and under pressure, because, as I have already indicated, one of the witnesses was actually engaged in another divorce hearing in another committee room. Such circumstances indicate clearly the pressure under which the hon. gentlemen of the other place operate in handling divorce cases.

I doubt whether more than a handful of the members of this house have read the evidence in the case now before us, but I believe it is one where there may be justification for the plea that is made. Hon. members are very tired indeed of discussing divorce cases. We are very tired of having cases of this sort come before us, and we are tired this afternoon because once again more cases are before us. If the motion for second reading is challenged I do not know what the result of the vote will be, but, as I pointed out on Friday night, many hon. members refuse to have anything to do with divorce cases. On Friday night there were three votes. Out of 256 members available to vote, seventy-six voted in the first instance, seventy-seven in the second case and seventy-nine in the third, indicating most clearly that hon. members do not want to have anything to do with these bills.

I think it is wrong that those who, because they are in attendance in the house, feel they are compelled to vote on these cases, are called upon to exercise that obligation. I do not think it is fair that those who belong to religious organizations that do not tolerate divorce under any circumstances should be called upon to consider them. I think that the bill now before us should not be proceeded with until the house has had an opportunity to give serious consideration to any alternative proposals there may be for removing this obligation from members of the House of Commons and placing it where these cases can be dealt with in a different manner and apart altogether from the membership of this house.

I realize that it is not right and proper for a minority, no matter what we think, to inflict our view upon the majority. Perhaps in discussing these cases only a minority of hon. members are vocal, but I believe in this instance the minority represents the opinion of the majority. The same thing applies to the cases themselves. I do not think a majority has the right to say that nobody shall grant divorces, because minorities have a right to individual and personal freedom; but I do not think this house should

be compelled to deal with the case now before us or any of the other cases on the list today.

I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles):

That this bill be not now read a second time but that it be resolved that in the opinion of this house further consideration of this bill should be deferred until this house has had an opportunity to discuss alternative methods of dealing with this divorce application.

I am limiting the amendment to the one particular bill, because in that way I believe that what I am suggesting is within the rules of the House of Commons. I am not anxious to force this matter to a division, and if the Prime Minister or the government generally care to give some assurance to the house that an alternative method of dealing with this divorce application and others that may come before us hereafter will be adopted, I shall not press the matter to a division.

I do not want to call for a division with respect to this particular bill, because I think there is some validity in the plea made for dissolution of the marriage. I think, however, that something must be done about this matter, because the present procedure is making the House of Commons a butt for ridicule. I think the dignity of parliament is undermined when we have to discuss bills of this description, and I know that members of the other place feel very much the same about the question as many hon. members of this house. Indeed I know that the chairman of one of the divorce committees of the other place last year said he would not accept the chairmanship of or membership on one of these committees again. Therefore I move this amendment in order that we may try as a parliament to refer this matter to a place where it can receive proper consideration and so that we may be relieved of a most unpleasant responsibility.

Mr. Pouliot: May I ask the hon. member a question? What is the alternative that the hon. member would suggest?

Mr. Coldwell: I refrained from mentioning any alternative because I wish to remain strictly within the rules of the house. I think that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has suggested an alternative on a number of occasions. He has suggested removing this matter from parliament and placing it under a federal court of law that would sit only in the city of Ottawa. Therefore no court would be established in the province of Quebec or in the province of Newfoundland. We would simply transfer from this house to a federal court sitting