

*House of Commons Procedures*

meant when they talk about a permanent Speaker. Certainly until they do I am not in a position to give the views of this party with regard to the establishment of a permanent Speakership. So far the responses to the suggestion of establishing such an office have been very nebulous and vague, indeed.

There have been three ideas advanced by various people, and I think they are contained in the brief which was prepared by Professor Denis Smith. The first is the so-called McGee Plan, which proposes that the Members of Parliament elect from among themselves one Member to be the Member for Parliament Hill. This would mean amending the constitution to make Parliament Hill a constituency, so that the Member elected would resign the seat to which he had been elected. A by-election would be held, and the hon. Member would become the Member for Parliament Hill. If that is what the Government has in mind, we would like to know. We are prepared to consider and examine that suggestion very carefully, but we do not know whether that is in fact what the Government has in mind.

The other proposal, which is usually mooted when one talks about a permanent Speaker, is that someone who is the Speaker, or is being promoted as a person suitable for the occupancy of the Chair, should be given an acclamation at the next election, in that all parties would undertake to refrain from opposing him. Under that proposal when such an individual returned to the House following an election would automatically be elected by the new House to the Chair. I want to make it very clear that in my opinion this is not a very satisfactory arrangement. I do not think that we here, whether it be the political leaders or the political parties, have any right to make a commitment that we will disfranchise the people of a particular constituency for an indefinite period of time.

If the people of any constituency decide that a man has been a very good Speaker and consequently ought not to be opposed, that of course is their privilege. Many of us would probably encourage them to take that point of view; but any political party that believes in the autonomy of the constituency organization, and I am one of those, certainly could not undertake to tell any constituency that they must not put up a candidate in a forthcoming election. I am not sure it would be a good thing for any other political leader to undertake such an assignment, because this would not necessarily be for one term, but could be for three or four terms; and that

is a long period of time during which to deny the people of a constituency the right to exercise their franchise.

The third concept that usually is associated with a permanent Speakership is that of continuity of tenure of the Speakership. In my opinion this makes a great deal more sense, and is to a very large extent the practice that is being followed in Great Britain. If a man has occupied the Chair with distinction and to the satisfaction of Members in all parts of the House, I think it would be all to the good if at dissolution all parties indicated that he had discharged his duties so satisfactorily that in the event of his being re-elected at the polls, whatever party formed the next Government, he would be nominated as the Speaker. That would ensure the continuity of tenure without committing any party to refrain from nominating a candidate to run against the Speaker. It would also ensure that a change of Government would not necessarily entail a change in Speakership. I have no doubt that, as has happened in Great Britain, if the Speaker has been continued in office over one or two terms, the likelihood is that the people of the constituency and the Members of the various parties would refrain from opposing him during an election, but they would do so on the basis of a voluntary decision made by the people. That would not require some of us here to decide who should be the Speaker, or who should nominate and who should not be nominated in a particular constituency.

I hope that this question of the so-called permanent Speakership will be clarified, because I think it is important that if we are going to abolish appeals against the Speaker's rulings the Speaker must more and more be divorced from partisan considerations. The continuity of tenure by the Speaker, irrespective of a change in Government, would go a long way toward removing any suspicion that there was bias or prejudice on the part of the Speaker when he makes the decisions he must make from time to time in order to carry on the work of the House. I trust that we are going to get some clarification of this point. That would be a forward step. If we are to reach some agreement, we ought to reach it on the basis of a distinct understanding of what we are talking about.

Certainly as far as I am concerned, I think the third alternative to which I have referred, the continuity of tenure, is the one which would cause the least dislocation and would be the easiest to apply. If this worked satis-