

Private Bills—Divorce

we are in effect saying that we believe one of these parties to be guilty of the offence charged.

It is true that the bill will go to a committee, but when we approve the second reading of a bill we adopt the principle. The principle of this bill is that a divorce should be granted. If that divorce is to be approved then in effect we say that we believe that one of the parties named in the bill is guilty. I say that that is undemocratic. It is out of line entirely with the best traditions of our parliamentary institutions. If this is the high court of parliament, as we sometimes call it, then we should conduct ourselves as a high court and not consent to the adoption of the principle of bills of this description without having one shred of evidence before us to substantiate the charge made.

I am not going to discuss divorce generally, but I think what has happened tonight illustrates the manner in which these divorces are granted by this parliament. There are 91 bills on the list tonight and if we had followed the practice of a few years ago those bills might have been passed. I believe we have dealt with 35 or 40 already this session. This parliament should not be called upon to deal with these bills under these circumstances and to become what is in effect a divorce mill as bad as Reno. It is really worse than Reno because there there is a hearing by the body which adjudicates. We are adjudicating tonight when we adopt the principle of a bill without having one shred of evidence to support it before us.

I do not know whether or not this divorce should be granted, and I take it that no one in this house knows because no one has had before him one shred of evidence in connection with this particular bill.

An hon. Member: The evidence is false.

Mr. Coldwell: Hon. members should be given the evidence in order to have an opportunity to review it and come to a conclusion on the evidence before casting their vote.

Someone interjects that the evidence is false. I know that in a good many instances that is true. We see the same investigators bringing in the same type of evidence with the same story and we know perfectly well that there is collusion and falsification of evidence. I cannot say that there is falsification of evidence or collusion in this case because I have not had an opportunity, nor has any other hon. member, of reviewing the evidence.

I submit that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was perfectly

justified in moving the adjournment of the debate until we get the evidence. I think some progress could have been made tonight if the bills without evidence had been set aside until the evidence was available. The other 37 bills before us could have been dealt with. Hon. members who had read the evidence could have voted for or against the bills as they came up.

When the last bill came before us I said, "on division", because I had not read the evidence and did not want to vote for a bill when I had not had time to read it although evidence was accessible to me. But if we adopt the principle of this bill we are in effect saying that we believe that the charge named in the bill is true. That is what we do when we adopt the principle. The hon. member for Grey-Bruce (Mr. Harris) shakes his head, but can he deny that when we adopt the principle of the bill we are adopting the principle that a divorce should be granted? We refer it to the committee with our blessings, but we have adopted the principle and expressed a considered opinion.

Once we have adopted the principle we have in effect rendered judgment. Of course, we shall have an opportunity to review that judgment after it has been before the committee, but nonetheless we are asked to support a bill at this time in connection with which there is not a solitary shred of evidence before us.

I think even now the house should not allow this bill to go through without the evidence being available. I think we would be justified in voting down the bill.

Mr. Graydon: May I ask the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who is leading the government tonight, whether the government has under consideration at the moment any plan for changing the manner of disposing of these cases in future?

Mr. Harris (Grey-Bruce): Mr. Speaker, I am not leading the house tonight. Three of my senior colleagues are present, and I would not want to say anything in answer to the question. I think it may be directed to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) at some future time if an answer is desired.

Mr. Graydon: Would the hon. member convey that to the Prime Minister? He sees him quite often.

Mr. Harris (Grey-Bruce): I shall.

Mr. E. T. Applewhaite (Skeena): As Your Honour saw fit to permit the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell) to complete his remarks, which dealt largely with procedure, I trust you will permit me to place in reply a few arguments which appeal to