

*Election of Speaker*

Mary. However, we are not yet constituted as a house; indeed, parliament itself cannot be said to be constituted until after the commons have chosen their Speaker. I therefore suggest that here and now we select and elect our speaker, and I wish to propose, as one who is a fit and proper person for that position, Mr. Pierre-François Casgrain, the member for Charlevoix-Saguenay.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The applause which has just greeted the name of Mr. Casgrain would indicate that at least to the hon. members on this side of the house the choice will be eminently satisfactory. I hope it will prove to be equally so on the part of all members of the house.

May I say a word to hon. members of the practice which prevails in the election of a Speaker. In most matters, as all hon. members know, we follow at Ottawa the procedure and practice of the parliament at Westminster. At Westminster, however, the practice has been, with regard to the Speaker, that, once he is elected, he is done the honour, if he is still a member of parliament, of being renominated at each succeeding parliament. Indeed, until last year, the practice had been not to offer opposition to the Speaker of the British House of Commons in a general election.

A similar practice, however, has not been followed in Canada since confederation. The reason, I imagine, is that in our country the population is so largely drawn from those of English origin and those of French origin that it has been felt appropriate that the Speaker of one parliament should be one who is of English descent and the Speaker of the next parliament one who is of French descent. In three instances, however, Speakers of previous parliaments have been re-nominated—this was the case with Speakers Cockburn, Rhodes and Lemieux. Each of these gentlemen was re-elected at the first session of a new parliament succeeding the one in which they had, in the first instance, been chosen Speaker. At the time of their re-election they were in parliament. The occupant of the office of Speaker in the preceding parliament is not a member of parliament at the present time. Consequently such a possibility need not at the moment be considered.

There is another circumstance which I feel it is my duty to bring to the attention of hon. members. In Great Britain the practice has been to have the Speaker nominated, not by a member of the government but by a private member—this in order to make it perfectly

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

clear that, whoever is chosen as Speaker, is the choice of the members of the commons themselves and not an appointee of the government. In Canada the practice since confederation has been different; the Speaker has been nominated by a member of the ministry, the prime minister, in fact, and I think the nomination has in all cases been accepted by members of the commons. It is but right, that the ministry should have at least an opportunity to make known its view with regard to the person it thinks should be appointed to the high office of Speaker. I wish to make it very clear, however, to hon. members, that the choice of a Speaker is the choice of the commons itself, and that hon. members themselves must elect the one who is to be the occupant of that office.

May I say a word as to the position of Speaker. It is, as we all know, the highest office in the gift of the House of Commons and the most honourable. Its occupant becomes the first commoner. He is the presiding officer of the house and, as such, has great responsibilities. To him is entrusted the custodianship of the honour, the rights, the privileges and the prerogatives of the commons. As presiding officer, he must, above all other qualifications, possess those of fairness and impartiality as between members of all parties in the House of Commons. Indeed, he is the protector of the rights of every individual member. It is also essential that, whoever be the occupant of that position should have a knowledge and a wide experience of the rules and regulations of the house. He must be familiar with parliamentary procedure, and he should also be possessed of a disposition which makes it easy for him to reconcile differences where they may arise, and at all times to see that the business of the house is carried on with the decorum that befits a great assembly such as this, which is representative of the nation.

I recognize that these are many qualifications, many virtues, to expect to find in any one man, but I do believe they are possessed in large measure by Mr. Casgrain, the gentleman whose name I have just proposed.

Mr. Casgrain has been for many years a member of the House of Commons—nearly twenty years, I think—and during most of that time has acted as one of the whips of his party, and for at least ten years as its chief whip. It may be thought by some that the position of chief whip would not necessarily be a qualification for the office of Speaker. I may point out, however, that the qualities which enable an hon. member to command the confidence of his own party are qualities