

English-speaking members are very attached to this tradition, and I believe that it is truly a tradition to let independent members take part in the discussions of the standing committees of the House.

Earlier I listened to the hon. member who has just sat down—I do not remember the area which he comes from, but it is the Progressive Conservative member who has just sat down—

An hon. Member: For Calgary North.

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval):—for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) congratulate the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones) and tell of all the good things that he was doing in the House and say that he was doing a good job. But I think that if he had congratulated him further, to conclude as he has done by saying that he likes his work in the House, it would have seemed that he did not want to work with him on standing committees. This is a very polite way of telling him: We like you well enough on the floor of the House, but we cannot stand you on committees. Like I said earlier, this is simply tolerated, but it has been tolerated in past years.

The Liberal spokesman said that it was necessary to have been elected within a party to be entitled to sit on standing committees. This is certainly stated in the Standing Orders, but I wonder if we could not at least accept to make an exception in the case of joint committees of the House and the Senate because indeed we have non-elected members on those joint committees. We have senators who are non-elected members of a party and who sit on committees. I think we could also accept an independent member on those committees because that would do away with the current requirement that he be an elected party member. To my knowledge, no senator is elected. They are all appointed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and they sit on the committees.

I found today that the introduction of such a bill was logical. Therefore I thought it is impossible after what has happened in the past years for the House to reject the request of the member for Moncton (Mr. Jones). At least, if his request is rejected, he should be allowed to sit on joint committees. There is no reason why he should not be accepted because he is more than a senator since he was elected by the people while senators are not; they are appointed for political reasons, period.

I feel the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones) is entitled to have his say not only in the House but also in committees because he is responsible. He was elected as all of us were in this House. He must face up to his responsibilities but if he is not given the opportunity of doing so, what will he do in his riding? He will be unable to assume his full role as a member.

It may be that the old parties are afraid of there being too many Independents in the House. I wonder why? I know that basically one wants to keep the majority. Each party, the Liberals, the Progressive Conservatives, are entitled to so many members on each committee in order to ensure the party in power a majority. If there were two, three or four Independents, they could control nothing because they do not belong to

Senate and House of Commons Act

a party. But if one wants to control, let one say so; and let no one come and tell us that this is a democratic government: the government is dictated to at the party level. What is decided by the party must be voted here in the House, at any price. Let us be frank and say that what they want is simply to maintain dictatorship over all other parties. It is for that reason alone that they deny today to the hon. member for Moncton the right to sit on one or two standing committees of the House. That is the only reason. That is why I regret today that all those who gave their opinion until now have failed to mention this. I would welcome others to stand up and talk on behalf of the hon. member for Moncton, so that this bill might be passed by the House.

● (1450)

[English]

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member for Moncton (Mr. Jones) has had the chance to bring his bill before the House today and to have the situation of an independent member discussed. I sympathize with him and I know the problem he faces, but I must say at the outset that if his bill were to come to a vote I could not support it.

Let me put it this way. I still believe that the party system is good for an institution such as parliament. I feel that if we had 264 Independents and tried to run the business of the country as an amorphous gang, we would not get along very well. We have to associate ourselves with parties so that like-minded people can work together. After all, that is the party system. However, without launching into a lecture let me say this: if a constituency decides that it wants not a member of a party but an independent member to represent it in the House of Commons, that independent member should have rights equal to those of all other members. Some of those rights flow naturally from membership in the House. The member gets a desk and seat in the House of Commons, office accommodation, pay, travel allowance, and all the rest of it. In that sense he is an equal, even though he does not belong to any of the other groups in the House of Commons.

The point the hon. member raised, to the effect that he should have a place on committees, deserves consideration, and I hope that will come about as a result of his bill being discussed this afternoon. The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) has already demonstrated the arithmetic, showing why we would be in difficulty if we began appointing one member to two committee positions. By doing that we should run out of committee positions before we could get around to all members, so to speak. There are just not enough committee positions to give all members two committee memberships.

Something else bothers me, Mr. Speaker. I do not think we should write the rules under which we operate into a statute. A few of our rules are governed by statute. There is the quorum in the British North America Act, and the rights and prerogatives of the Speaker, which are also in that act. But it is generally accepted that we make our own rules, as a House of