

Sir John A. Macdonald uttered the words I have just quoted in 1865, and it is coincidental that 116 years later we find ourselves in an almost identical situation at about the same time of year. Sir John A. in the confederation debate was about to put the previous question. He did that on March 5, and described his motion as follows:

I move, sir, that the main question be now put.

Explaining his motion after having said that, he said:

That was the proposition made by the government. It was a fair, liberal, even a generous one.

Sir John A. Macdonald, after two months of debate put the question on March 5, 1865.

Mr. Clark: How many members were in the House?

Mr. Pinard: On March 10 or March 11, at one o'clock in the morning, the confederation debate was over. It was a former Tory Prime Minister of Canada who uttered the words which I have just quoted. If he were in this House today, he would be ashamed of the attitude of Her Majesty's official opposition. He found that after two months it was enough. Yet we have been debating this question almost six months. We allowed this question to go to a joint committee of the House and the Senate where many amendments were debated. We are now in the sixth week of debate on one amendment put by the hon. member for Provencher. We have not yet been able to dispose of this amendment and deal with the rest of the resolution.

The reasons the hon. member for Oshawa rose today are obvious. He is saying to the official opposition, and I join with him, that if they do not agree with our proposals, they cannot claim they have not had time to speak. They have been allowed almost six months, compared to the two months which were allowed by Sir John A. Macdonald, to deal with the old confederation. They have had ample time and they must recognize that, in a democracy, in a parliamentary system, there is a time when the government must have its way. There is a time when a question must be put and there is a time when elected representatives of the people of Canada decide if it is to be approved or rejected. But it is basically wrong for a House leader to say he will not allow a question that has been discussed over a six-month period of time to come to a vote—

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I did not say that.

Mr. Pinard:—and will deliberately waste the time of the House of Commons of Canada. That is wrong, Madam Speaker. That is unacceptable.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Pinard: There are 25 minutes left before we reach private members' hour at four o'clock today. I am sure the official opposition will not allow me to put the motion to allow all members of Parliament to be on record, and allow most of them to speak for 20 minutes each over the next four days, each day comprising 13 hours. I am pretty sure the official opposition will not allow me to do that today.

Privilege—Mr. Lawrence

We have the weekend ahead of us. I invite the official opposition to respect the dignity of this institution, to respect the Speaker and to allow this Parliament to work, and—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pinard:—and after six months to allow a question to be put. I invite them to reflect on what Sir John A. Macdonald said exactly 116 years ago.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I think I can dispose of this particular question of privilege. First, I want to tell hon. members that I am not trying to push ahead with business of the House, but I have several notices of questions of privilege. Like any good administrator, I must try to get rid of papers on my desk, if at all possible and I must insist on doing it that way when a question of privilege is obviously not a question of privilege. I think I can rule in that sense that this is obviously a debate.

The hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent) did not indicate there had been any irregularities in the procedure or in the customs of the House. He does not like what some hon. members are doing during the course of this debate, but that is not for me to determine. The rules are there precisely to ensure that the democratic right of Members of Parliament to speak are protected. Since hon. members did not detect any irregularities in the proceedings, I have to say that, while it might be debate, differences of opinions—all of these things together perhaps—but the hon. member did not have a question of privilege.

The next question of privilege I have is in the name of the hon. member for Durham-Northumberland (Mr. Lawrence).

Mr. Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I gave you notice this morning at the earliest possible moment of a question of privilege. At the same time I gave verbal notice to the minister concerned. The Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) was here earlier, but he is not in the House now. I seek your guidance as to whether I should continue. You know the gist and the substance of my question of privilege because I gave it to you in writing. Perhaps I should wait until Monday when the minister will be here.

Madam Speaker: That is the hon. member's choice. I cannot tell him when to raise his question of privilege. His notice is in order. It came at the proper time. There is no rule about the order in which I should hear questions of privilege. However, I shall tell hon. members that I classify them in the order in which they reach me. I have now come to the hon. member's question of privilege. I know the hon. minister is not in the House, but that does not preclude the hon. member from raising his question of privilege. The only thing which might happen is that I would not rule in the minister's absence.

Mr. Lawrence: Madam Speaker, under the circumstances, I think as a courtesy to the minister, if you do not mind and as long as I am not abrogating any rights as far as my question of