

To justify that flagrant violation of an usage centuries old, the Government invoked rule 17 of this House; and through the honourable member for Hastings (Mr. Northrup), moved that the leader of the Opposition be deprived of his right to speak and this right attributed to the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries (Mr. Hazen). This afternoon, the hon. member of Finance (Mr. White) contended that no insult had been offered to the leader of the Opposition, in thus depriving him of his right to speak, considering that rule 17 authorizes such a course. The hon. minister is mistaken; the enforcement of that rule, under the circumstances which I have stated, was improper and illegal. Rule 17 reads thus:

When two or more members rise to speak, Mr. Speaker calls upon the member who first rose in his place: but a motion may be made that any member who has risen 'be now heard,' or 'do now speak,' which motion shall be forthwith put without debate.

So then, when several hon. gentlemen rise at the same time to address the House, the Speaker gives the floor to the one who was on his feet; and, as stated by authorities on parliamentary procedure, it is improper after that to interfere with the Speaker's choice. Bourinot, at pages 457 and 458 under the title 'Precedence in Debate', thus expressed himself:

The Speaker of the Commons will always give precedence in debate to that member who first catches his eye.

When two or more members rise to speak, Mr. Speaker calls upon the member who first rose in his place; but a motion may be made that any member who has risen 'be now heard,' or 'do now speak.'

It is usual, however, to allow priority to members of the Administration who wish to speak and in all important debates it is customary for the Speaker to endeavour to give the preference alternately to the known supporters and opponents of a measure or question; and it is irregular to interfere with the Speaker's call in favour of any other member.

If, moreover, the member who has been given the floor by the Speaker has risen, and not only is on his feet but has begun to speak, that motion provided for in rule 17 cannot be made any more; as the member cannot be interrupted, save in connection with a point of order, and that motion is not on a point of order. So then, on April 9th, not only did the Government deny to the leader of the Opposition a sacred right, but in order to deprive him of that right it committed a breach of usage, it acted unlawfully and had its course approved by the brute force of a majority. And that devious and hateful course, the Government adopted it deliberately, in order to force the previous question on the Opposition and to prevent the latter from changing a single line, a

single word, in the new regulations; and at the same time it deprived the House of any suggestion emanating from hon. gentlemen on this side of the House.

After recalling those facts, am I not justified in stating that under the circumstances the action of the Government is equivalent to deeds of despotism, inspired by a spirit of tyranny; yes, tyranny, let us not shrink from using the word, when these gentlemen in power do not hesitate in doing the thing, do not recoil at the thought of violating the rights of the Opposition, though they cannot attain that object without being guilty of improper and illegal conduct.

I may give some further evidence of the arbitrary character of these proceedings. In his speech, the Prime Minister, of course, attempted to justify this resolution by alleging the desirability of ensuring the more speedy transaction of public business in this House. In that respect, his contention may appear to be plausible to a certain extent. I have not had sufficient experience in this House to be able to state 'urbi et orbi' whether he is right or wrong. I would rather abide by the opinion of members who have been sitting in this House for many years and have personally ascertained whether there are deficiencies in some respects. But, of the latter, there are a good many in the ranks of the Opposition, and relatively a larger number than on the Government side. Such is not evidently the opinion of the Prime Minister, at least his acknowledged opinion. If we are to judge by his action, any idea, any suggestion, respecting the efficiency of the rules of the House cannot and should not emanate from any others than himself and his followers.

On the other hand, however high his estimate of himself and of his friends in that respect, I venture to bring forward, without hesitation, as superior to theirs, the experience, the knowledge, and the ability of the leader of the Opposition, who has been a member of this House for forty years, and, for twenty-five years, has been the leader, either of the Opposition, or of the Government. Why has the Government, by moving the previous question, deprived itself of the help of the leader of the Opposition and of a number of his supporters, highly qualified, they also, by their experience and their knowledge of parliamentary procedure? If the Government acted candidly, if its motives were true, above reproach, why has it thus brutally closed the mouths of those hon. gentlemen and their leader?

What then was the terrible proposal which that leader intended to make? The simplest, the most sensible proposal, and that consecrated by the longest usage: The appointment of a committee made up