

swer to the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Beland):

Mr. Beland: May I be permitted to ask a question.

Mr. Speaker: No, because I asked the Chair to give a ruling. The debate is closed. I want the ruling of the Chair.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that any chairman would likely take those remarks, if your Honour is correctly reported in Hansard, as being an order from you as Speaker that he should give his ruling without further discussion.

I have nothing more to say upon this question; I think it is one of very great importance indeed, because in a body like the House of Commons the only guarantee of freedom of discussion is that there shall be latitude to the members to speak upon the various questions which come before us. The rules of Parliament have been carefully prepared; they have been in existence since Confederation, not always as they are to-day it is true, because in 1910 they were revised in the ordinary and proper manner by a joint committee of the House, which consisted of gentlemen representing both political parties. I remember that on that committee was my right hon. friend the then Prime Minister, now the leader of the Opposition (Sir Wilfrid Laurier), and my right hon. friend the present leader of the Government (Mr. Borden). Those rules and amendments were unanimously agreed upon as being best suited to insure liberty of discussion, to prevent matters being discussed in an irrelevant manner, to prevent tedious repetition of argument and to bringing discussion to an end as speedily as would be reasonably possible. I think it was of the greatest importance that we on this side of the House should endeavour to direct, as far as we could do so, the attention of the Chairman, of Your Honour and of hon. gentlemen opposite to the fact that all that we were standing for, pleading for and demanding, was an observance of the rules of the House. It would be most dangerous—and I think the Speaker of the House should be the very last to countenance such a course—that a majority should be allowed to disregard the rules of the House. If the majority can do just as it pleases, then the minority might just as well go home and leave it to the majority to carry on the affairs of Parliament. These rules are framed for the protection of the minority. When you protect the minority in Parliament, you are protecting the interests of at all events a large number of the people, whose interests have as much right to be protected as those of the majority. Therefore when the Chairman, as we thought, and anyone who reads the rule and has regard to what was the practice

Mr. PUGSLEY.

of the British House of Commons in 1867, will think, in violation of the rule which permits freedom of discussion, deliberately sought to put the question and refused to give the hon. member for Humboldt (Mr. Neely) an opportunity of being heard, he was taking a course which certainly endangered the liberty of Parliament, was an infringement upon the right of free speech, and one which ought to be discountenanced not only by yourself, Mr. Speaker, but by every hon. member.

Mr. W. F. NICKLE (Kingston): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for St. John city (Mr. Pugsley) has referred to the part which the hon. member for Brandon (Mr. Aikins) played in that memorable scene of some few nights ago, I think it is but fair to you, Sir, to the Deputy Speaker and to the House at large that I should tell what little I know of what then occurred. Hon. members are well aware that the members of this House during the prolonged two weeks sitting had been taking, so to speak, relays in keeping the House in quorum. During the early part of Friday evening, I had been in my room, and on entering this House I received word by a page that the acting Chairman was desirous that I should take the Chair. Having attended the sitting during the entire Thursday night, I told the hon. member for Brandon the circumstances, and said, 'If you are on duty to-night, you had better take the Chair, and not I'; and such word was then taken to the Deputy Speaker, who, so far as I know, requested the hon. member for Brandon to take the Chair, and he did so. So far as my part went in the drama, I had not been consulted by the then acting Chairman as to taking the position of Chairman. I had no knowledge of any preconceived arrangement by which I was to take the Chair, and I am perfectly satisfied from the conduct of the hon. member for Brandon at the time that he was as greatly surprised as I was at being asked to assume the duties of that position. I have listened with considerable interest to the remarks of the hon. member for St. John. While listening to him, my fancy has perhaps run away with me. I am inclined to think that, if at any time he should sever his connection with this House, an admirable career is open to him on the stage of this country as well as of the old world. When I regard him to-night in that calm, suave, dignified, courteous role that he knows so well how to display, and when I compare it with his conduct here some nights ago, when he assured us that he had himself equally well under control, I realize that there is a magnificent opportunity for him to develop himself as an actor of prominence and pre-eminence.