

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 19, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRIVILEGE

MR. BALDWIN—DOCUMENT ALLEGED TO HAVE
BEEN ISSUED BY HON. MEMBER FOR YORK
EAST RESPECTING NEW RULES

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which I think should be brought to the attention of Your Honour and of the house, and in respect of which I have given notice pursuant to the appropriate standing order. This matter of privilege is one that I think affects to a considerable extent the members of this house; certainly it affects the hon. members on the government side directly, and I suppose all members indirectly.

I come directly to the point. My question of privilege arises from a statement that is made in what appears to be a form letter sent out by the hon. member for York East (Mr. Otto) to what would appear to be the electors of his constituency. With much of what he says in his letter or circular I agree, and I want to make it plain that I am not making any charges or suggestion, or saying anything derogatory about the hon. member. The particular part of the letter that needs to be brought to the attention of the house reads as follows:

The new rules are now in effect, in the House of Commons, and since you will recall that I fought for these changes for six years, I am pleased to report that the business of the House of Commons will at long last progress with some efficiency.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: I am glad the hon. members are seizing the only opportunity that they will have to applaud the contents of this letter. It continues:

There have been some disappointments, mostly in the composition and power of the committees, because although the committees have been given a great deal of work to do, the government members of the committee have been instructed to make no changes to the bills, coming before the committee—

Some hon. Members: Shame.

● (2:10 p.m.)

Mr. Baldwin: I continue:

—and to vote exactly as they are told by the government. However, since I have dealt with this at some length in a speech which was well covered by the press, I shall not go further into this subject, at this time.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Baldwin: If this letter is widely circulated in Toronto hon. members on the government side of the house may be subjected to criticism or abuse which this letter is bound to generate.

To show that there is some foundation to my question of privilege may I quote from citation 210 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, third edition:

The privilege of freedom of speech enjoyed by members of parliament is in truth the privilege of their constituents. It is secured to members not for their personal benefit, but to enable them to discharge the functions of their office—

In some instances that rule has been exercised to protect hon. members from prosecution. To some extent the encroachments of the party system in the House of Commons have diminished this rule. Sometimes, on questions of principle, we vote by party. However, we were led to believe after June 25 that all this was to be changed and that the millenium had arrived, the golden age. While debating certain proposals in the Procedure Committee we were told that in the new committee system hon. members supporting the government, hon. members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and hon. members of all other parties could park their partisanship outside the committee room and, in the "clubby" spirit of the new committees, work with one another for the benefit of the people of Canada. If the contents of the letter I have referred to are correct, and I hope the Prime Minister will take the opportunity to contradict what the letter says, the government has destroyed the edifice of the committee system on which our new rules are predicated. Despite what some of the more experienced members of my party said, I was naïve enough to believe that partisanship would have no place in our committee structure. It appears I was mistaken.