

The Address—Question of Privilege

a set time. There is a limited time for the debate and such practice came into effect only a very few years ago, while the hon. member for Laurier (Mr. Chevrier) was out of the house and engaged with the St. Lawrence seaway authority. I do not know exactly what the hon. member is aiming at in raising this question of privilege which is not really a question of privilege at all but I can assure him that the government is trying to be fair to all the hon. members in the house and particularly to the hon. members of the opposition and the C.C.F. and that this will be our course throughout the session.

I would also point out to the hon. member that in the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne members from all the constituencies of Canada have the duty of bringing to the attention of the house and in that way to the press and to the country the problems which face their constituents. Surely the hon. member is not contending that in a house divided as this house is divided and on a debate where the time is limited that the private members supporting the government should only have half the chance of presenting the problems of their constituents that the other private members have. We are prepared to give the Liberal and C.C.F. parties far more time than their numbers would justify in a debate of this kind but it would be absolutely unfair to the private members who happen to be supporters of the government if they were to be precluded from speaking in this debate by giving Liberal and C.C.F. members much more time than that to which they should be entitled. The hon. member for Laurier and his associates I think will find that they will be treated fairly, not only in this debate but on all other occasions. I do suggest that all hon. members should have a reasonably equal opportunity to express their views in this particular debate.

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, may I say a word on the question of privilege which has just been raised?

Mr. Speaker: May I with respect to all hon. members ask that they defer the matter of priority in this debate until tomorrow. There may be some question as to whether the hon. member for Laurier should have been recognized when he rose but I recognized the hon. member for Halifax carrying out some arrangements which were made by the whips. I do confess that they were unable to agree completely but I have taken the liberty of making the choice. If the house does not agree with my choice it always has the

remedy under the rules to move that a particular member be now heard but I hope that course will not be taken. It is my hope that the whips will agree to a rotation. It is true that every hon. member in the house has an equal right to be heard in this debate. It is a limited debate and I shall endeavour within my power to hold an even balance and see that every hon. member has his turn. I will recognize the hon. member for Laurier next which will give him an opportunity of speaking tonight.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, with great respect I rose to speak only because of the statement which has been made, I am sure in good faith, by the leader of the house in regard to the practice in the past which was not, as I understand it, accurate and in accordance with the facts which existed at that time. The hon. member pointed out that while a practice may have existed before the change in the house took place in 1957 whereby the official opposition which were few in number were given a high proportion of the speaking right nevertheless this was altered in 1957 because of a change in the rules which limited the time of debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne and on the budget. He said that since that time the earlier practice had not applied. I simply wanted to point out that the facts are that in the debate on the address in 1957 after the rules had been changed and after the debate had been limited to ten days there were 169 members in the government party of whom 55 spoke on the address; there were 51 members of the official opposition of whom 30 or more than half spoke; there were 22 members of the C.C.F. of whom 17 spoke; and there were 15 members of the Social Credit party of whom ten were given the right to speak. We ask that that proportion which we think is fair in view of the practice since that time should be adopted now.

Mr. Speaker: I am aware of those facts and I am sure they are on the record. I would hope that the matter would not be debated because it is not actually a debatable matter and I would hope that the representatives of the parties will be able to find a satisfactory solution of a difficult problem because if I were to recognize members strictly in the proportion in which the parties now sit in this house it would obviously mean that those in the opposition would speak but infrequently and I trust that some arrangement will be made before this matter arises again. In the meantime I recognize the hon. member for Halifax.

Some hon. Members: Closure.