

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 3, 1992

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

[*English*]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER FOR SAINT-LÉONARD

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Alfonso Gagliano, member for the electoral district of Saint-Léonard has been appointed as a member of the Board of Internal Economy in place of Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier for the purposes and under the provisions of chapter 42, first supplement of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, entitled an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Pursuant to Standing Order 30(6), the House will now proceed to consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1867

MEASURE TO AMEND

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West) moved that Bill C-270, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (oath of allegiance), be read the second time and referred to Legislative Committee H.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege for me to rise in debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-270, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867.

This bill attempts to amend by way of the founding document of our Constitution, the oath of allegiance

members of Parliament must swear before they take their seats in this time-honoured Chamber. All members of Parliament, from Gander—Grand Falls to Saint-Maurice to Saanich—Gulf Islands, who put forward their names on ballots for general elections to the Canadian House of Commons and who win the privilege of taking their seats must swear an oath of allegiance before the Clerk of the House.

What is the nature of an oath, Mr. Speaker, be it to Queen, to country, or a general notion of collective values? Members of legislative assemblies across the world swear some type of oath after being elected to or in some cases appointed to national legislative councils. In one sense an oath is a legal requirement, in another sworn for dutiful or moral reasons.

• (1110)

The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, states in his writing on liberty that an oath is a manifestation and part of the social contract. As Mill states: "What are called duties to ourselves are not socially obligatory unless circumstances render them duties to others. The only purpose for which legislative power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a community against the person's will is to prevent harm to others. His own good is not sufficient warrant."

In other words, an oath is not to be taken lightly and bears on the conduct of each member of this House. The oath of allegiance reminds us of what our primary responsibilities as members of Parliament are; the creation and passage of legislation beneficial to the common good of our country. We are sent here with a mandate from our electors with their faith and confidence in us, and we are rightly expected to act in accordance with the oath we swear before taking our seats in this Chamber.

As we all know, Canadians hold their elected representatives in less and less esteem, with less and less confidence to act in accordance with their best interests. I believe that if we are to reform our institutions, we must build from the bottom up. We must begin this process before we assume our seats in this House or take office and before we put into motion any sort of new constitutional mechanisms.