

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, June 29, 1956

The house met at eleven o'clock.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

ALLEGED IMPROPER ACTION OF MR. SPEAKER

Hon. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise both on a question of privilege and of major public importance. In view of the intolerable situation created in this house by the utterly unprecedented actions of the Speaker in improperly impugning the motives of many of the hon. members in a letter, I ask the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Howe) to assure us that the government will deal with this situation in the only way in which it can be dealt with effectively, by taking the necessary steps to dissolve the house and give the people of Canada the earliest possible opportunity to elect a new parliament.

Mr. M. J. Coldwell (Rosetown-Biggarr): I must say that I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew) in this matter. I feel very sick at heart over this whole matter, and having had respect for the house and the Chair, I feel that the situation has become quite intolerable and that there is no way out but the election of a new parliament and the assembling of a new group in this House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: May I be allowed to say a word of personal explanation? It seems to me the point at issue at the moment is whether or not a person who occupies the office that I have the honour to occupy at the moment is or is not deprived of being able to write personal correspondence. It has been established, I think—if it has not been established, I am prepared to establish it to the satisfaction of all hon. members, I am sure—that I made the comment in a personal letter which was not directed to a newspaper, which was never intended to be published and which I never thought would ever be published—I can assure you of that—and which unfortunately has been published.

Now, because one or two paragraphs of a private letter that I addressed to a man who is a free lance writer appears in a newspaper—a letter addressed to his residence—of course it becomes known that with respect to a certain matter I have an opinion which

is at divergence with the opinion held by other hon. members. Now, I submit this to hon. members for their consideration. We had a debate concerning a certain measure over which I had to preside. I think hon. members, if they want to be fair, will agree that the chair during those days was not a bed of roses. Members who are not satisfied with rulings, or with the conduct of the Chair, because the Speaker is the servant of the house, have two recourses provided by our traditional forms of procedure: one, appeals from the Speaker's rulings; two, motions of censure. Both of these two recourses have been taken advantage of.

Now, I cannot participate in debate. I must, however, put questions affecting myself. See Beauchesne's third edition, citation 86 and Bourinot's fourth edition, page 179. I presided over the debate which took place on the motion of censure against myself, and I put the question affecting myself. During that debate I did not speak. Some hon. members here know that before the debate on the motion of censure started I wanted to speak. As a matter of fact I thought I had the right to be heard.

Mr. Winch: You did have the right to be heard.

Mr. Speaker: Well, at that time there was a question as to whether or not I had that right. My program on Sunday before the Monday on which this debate was initiated, as I suggested, was that the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the C.C.F. party speak on the motion of censure and I wanted to take the floor immediately after that; but there was hesitancy as to whether I should do that, or whether I had the right to do it.

I want to tell hon. members this. I have received several letters, some very critical, others commending my attitude during the pipe-line debate. In replying to those letters which I have received, whether of criticism or of commendation, I said several things, and I am sure that if they were all to be published, as this personal letter was, it would indicate one thing, that a man who is accused and has not been able to say his piece is in a very deplorable situation indeed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: The worst criminal in this country, the man accused of spying, is asked before sentence is passed, "Do you have anything to say?" Now, I am not blaming the