

Election of Speaker

first elected Speaker in 1974. He has been fair, effective and sensitive in presiding over this House through five active years.

It is, therefore, Dr. Koester, my great pleasure to move, seconded by the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Trudeau):

That James Jerome, Esquire, member for the electoral district of Sudbury, do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Koester, dear colleagues of the House of Commons, may the agreement between the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark) and myself on the appointment of the hon. member for Sudbury (Mr. Jerome) as Speaker of the House of Commons be a token of harmony during this new Parliament. His appointment is also of historical significance in that, for the first time ever, a member of the opposition has been recommended for that important office by the government party.

● (1105)

[*English*]

I must confess that I feel a little like a father sending a son off into the world, anxious for his well-being but confident in his ability and determination to fight for the common good.

In the context of this Parliament, the hon. member for Sudbury is a natural choice to guide its business, moderate its disputes and uphold its procedures. I think we have made a right choice, for in the past five years he has presided over this House with wisdom, understanding and good humour. It would be a tough act to follow, and it is perhaps provident for all of us that he is following his own act.

Filled with good will as we are today, most of us know this will not be an easy Parliament. I suppose no Parliament is easy, but the experience of the last two decades has shown that minority Parliaments are fascinating, challenging and nerve-racking. Perhaps no-one's nerves are more on the rack than those of the Speaker, who holds the reins to pull the House together.

[*Translation*]

It can very well be stated and repeated that the government will act as if it had a majority, but the facts remain unchanged. Given that element of suspense, the atmosphere will be electric and the Speaker will have a difficult part to play warding off a storm. It rests with us all to recognize that the proceedings of the House are always vitally important for the country and go beyond mere partisan interests. My right hon. colleague opposite and his party now form the government. As for myself and the Liberal party, we will be playing a new role in the opposition. The roles have been reversed, but I am sure that both sides have had an opportunity to think it over during the past few months.

[Mr. Clark.]

● (1110)

[*English*]

There can be an honest debate over the many changes of the past decade, but there is no question that change, slow as it always is with the parliamentary structure, has produced benefits for all parties. Rather than stifle opportunity, it has expanded it and past oppositions have benefited in a way to make them, as I well know, much more effective observers of government.

I talk of rule changes, of course, but there are many other innovations which were brought forth in the past ten years to make the oppositions more effective critics of governments, such as research staffs for caucuses, increased office and staff, space in the Confederation Building, offices in the constituencies, certain travel and telecommunications facilities, and broadcasting of the House of Commons. All these have made Parliament more effective, and the oppositions more effective.

Equally as important as change is the interpretation of change to fit the pressures of the House of Commons. In the past five years, the Chair has assessed these pressures in accordance with the Standing Orders and has issued, on a variety of occasions, its view of how procedures are best adapted to the functioning of the House.

In 1975, the hon. member for Sudbury set out in some detail his views on the considerations which should govern the daily question period, which he described as unique. To use his own words:

It is an excellent feature of our Parliament and while we have much to learn from other governmental systems, the question period is one area in which we are in the forefront of responsible government and every effort must be made to preserve the excellence of this practice.

He went on to say:

—a basic principle governing the question period ought to be such that it will enable members to put questions with a minimum of interference.

In a similar manner, he widened the operation of Standing Order 43 when it was agreed, in 1976, to allow 15 minutes to this procedure rather than have it encroach on the question period itself. I use these examples, Mr. Koester, to illustrate how the House has benefited from a flexible approach to its procedures in rapidly changing times.

I wish to assure the hon. member for Sudbury, should the House elect him to succeed himself, that this opposition will strive to follow the interpretations he has set down in the past which always gave a fair shake to the opposition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Finally, I would like to touch briefly on another aspect of this nomination which we feel is extremely important. This party has adhered consistently over the years to the underlying principle of the independence of the Speaker. On a number of occasions we have had debates and arguments about what independence means. I know some of my friends in other parties believe it is best achieved by the creation of a permanent Speaker who is above participation in the political