

*Private Bills—Divorce*

I hope there will be a scale of fees recommended by the learned Attorney General of Canada. He has not been long in the department, but he is a man with a practical mind, and I would appeal to him to help solve this great question and to lay down a scale of fees to be charged.

Mr. W. GARFIELD CASE (Grey North): I think it might be well, Mr. Speaker, for me to add some words to what has been said, since I have interested myself in this phase of our national life. I doubt whether we can legislate people into happiness, and therefore I am not in any sense taking exception to divorce as a principle. I feel, however, that much could be said regarding the method employed.

I have it on good authority that these divorces are dealt with at the rate of four an hour in the other place, and sometimes the rate is even more rapid. A firm of detectives in the city of Montreal—practically the same firm of detectives—supplies all the evidence, which is apparently written according to form and submitted no doubt to save time.

My principal objection is that not sufficient time is available to deal with the various phases of the applications, and to deal with them conclusively. No provision is made for the ones who are likely to suffer most; that is, the children in the family involved. If my memory serves me correctly, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. St. Laurent), when Minister of Justice, promised that the government would give some consideration to the possibility of setting up a central court of a character that would deal with these divorce bills.

I feel that local autonomy must be respected, and since the province of Quebec does not care to have divorce courts we find that the bulk of the divorce applications come from that province.

I think there is some point in what the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Church) said, that if this is to go on we should seek to set up a legal committee of the House of Commons to review these divorce bills. After all, I question very much whether many hon. members read the evidence. If you read the evidence in one or two bills you will find a certain resemblance between them and each of the others. We are not in the position of a jury. We have not heard the evidence; we have had no opportunity of cross-examining witnesses. In other words, we know absolutely nothing about what has taken place. We are simply treated as rubber-stamps and are supposed to give our approval

[Mr. Church.]

to something of which we know little or nothing. This puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

I suggest that if this system is to continue, the final disposition should be made by the other place and should not be referred to this chamber at all. They are the ones who hear the evidence and who enjoy the right of cross-examination, and therefore they are the ones in the best position to approve or disapprove.

I wish to leave that thought with hon. members, because something must be done to cope with the situation, which certainly is not in the best interests of those families that are bound to be affected, particularly the little children whose fate is to be decided by a civil action at some later date. I hope the government will even yet give some consideration to a more practical plan of dealing with the hundreds of divorce cases that come from our sister province of Quebec.

Mr. J. A. DION (Lake St. John-Roberval) (Translation): Mr. Speaker, I wish to add a few words only in support of the remarks just made by the hon. member for Charlevoix-Saguenay (Mr. Dorion). I do not always share his opinion, but tonight I am in complete agreement with his views and I have no hesitation in saying so.

I believe that the present procedure in divorce bills is highly unsatisfactory to the members of this house. As the hon. member said a moment ago, we are faced with a number of bills which we know nothing about and we are asked to vote on them although we are entirely unaware of their purport. The makers of our constitution vested in parliament the right to legislate on divorce cases arising in provinces where no divorce courts are established. Divorce cases in such provinces must come before parliament to be settled by a bill. This method was meant to render divorce less frequent and more difficult to secure. But with the present practice, parliament has become a divorce mill and, as a result, divorce is much easier to obtain. We are thus defeating the very ends which the authors of our constitution had hoped to attain.

It is our responsibility to devise a more efficient procedure as regards the consideration of such bills. We must know on what we are expected to vote before coming to a decision. May I suggest that a committee of this house be appointed to consider, amend and improve the present procedure in that respect.

Mr. EUGENE MARQUIS (Kamouraska): Mr. Speaker, I shall add only one word in support of the hon. member for Charlevoix-