

Constituency Records

If a member retires and his constituency is swallowed up by other constituencies not represented by the same party, I would think that those members would be willing to share their case load and their experience. Perhaps the independence of parliament act is where we should deal with the absolute question of destruction of official documents.

The member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton, I assume, is indicating that birth certificates, affidavits or that type of thing were shredded in the environs of this parliament. If this is true I do not think anyone could support that kind of action. Documents are sent to us by our constituents on a confidential basis and they expect them to be returned. Indeed, I would expect such action when a file is dead. It would be good form to contact certain constituents who have sent very sensitive documents to you to make sure that even the copies of these documents are returned to their originators upon defeat of the member.

Again, we should not go the route of this bill to achieve this end. This debate this afternoon serves its purpose in drawing to the attention of hon. members in this chamber the very problem the bill proposes to rectify. It is on the record. There will be hon. members in this chamber who will be defeated in the next election, I am sure. It happens. There will be those who resign. I see that the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski) has a funny look on his face. I do not know whether he is contemplating defeat or not, but with the rise of Liberal fortunes in western Canada that cannot be counted out.

Mr. Mazankowski: Not at all.

Mr. Collenette: I would like to deal with the element of confidentiality a bit more. The hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton talked in terms of a member of parliament on the same footing as other professionals—accountants, lawyers and doctors. Maybe it is arrogance on my part or maybe it is naivety, but I believe that members of parliament occupy a special presence within our society, one that is not more privileged but is special in its service to the country.

I would not accept the element of professionalism in the same context as the hon. member, so I would not want him to give people the wrong impression, that just because a certain thing is expected of professionals then it should necessarily follow from us. There must be an element of discretion that is permitted members of parliament by virtue of our office and position in society. Again, my point of view can only be accepted if society at large accepts the point of view that hon. members are indeed responsible, and that they are honourable despite the fact there may be cases where honourable conduct has not been forthcoming.

One other element I would like to talk about, should Bill C-244 go through as we have it not, is the policing aspect. As a member of parliament—again, perhaps it is arrogance, naivety or my own peculiarities—I believe that I have to answer to only one constituency in this country and that constituency is the one that elected me. I do not believe that I should be

policed, even after my defeat or even by my colleagues, no matter how much I respect them.

Indeed, for a party such as the Conservatives, who are continuously talking about the evils of security, policing and government bureaucracy, I would think this is the last thing that they would want. Given what I have said about the attitude towards members of parliament for the concept of a member of parliament in the British tradition, I am surprised that this kind of bill does come from the Conservative party, a party which is known for being one that has always tried to preserve the British parliamentary system to the hilt, at least according to the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), who gives one the impression that the Conservative party is the only party that has any respect for this place. This, of course, is not true, but even if you accept one iota of that argument, then bringing this bill here this afternoon seems inconsistent.

In conclusion, I commend the hon. member for giving us an opportunity to discuss this bill in the House. I would certainly not be opposed—though I would not be prepared to move such a motion myself because of my peculiar position as chairman of the committee—if the subject matter of this bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. I think also the hon. member should talk to his House leader and his other colleagues who will be dealing with the independence of parliament act, and perhaps the government could make some accommodation for some of the provisions in this bill, or at least include some statements on expected behaviour when members are defeated without actually stipulating that all documents, irrespective of their content, must be handed over to one's successor.

• (1632)

[Translation]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few comments on this bill. I think that Bill C-244, which would require members of parliament to pass on to their successors any files they possess dealing with matters relating to their constituency poses a very sensitive question. This afternoon, I heard a member make a comparison with professionals such as notaries and lawyers who are bound by law to keep important documents, and to preserve the secrecy of their correspondence. I would not put a member of parliament in the same category as a professional, first of all simply because there is no association, as in the case of the professional, which forces him to act in such a way, there is no code of ethics which requires him to ensure secrecy and preserve all documents. Also, I think the role of the member of parliament is a temporary one. I would rather compare his role with that of a mayor, a chairman of a school board or a chairman of some agency. It is so temporary as a matter of fact that I am surprised to hear that some members keep the original birth certificates, and extremely important contracts in their files here in parliament.