

The Address—Mr. Broadbent

the House show some good will. Harmony is a sign of prosperity, division a sign of misfortune. It is always unfortunate to be divided, and all Canadians are watching us today. They are watching television. The broadcasting of the debates is certainly an advantage. It helps Canadians understand our speeches without having to resort to other media. Sometimes the facts were distorted, sometimes not. But, Mr. Speaker, the House was mainly interested in respecting its tradition instead of going by the standing orders. We tried to be reasonable. Decisions were rendered which were wise. Often the Chair availed itself of decisions rendered by previous Speakers.

Today, however, with all due respect to the Chair, I should like to recall a decision which Speaker Lamoureux rendered in this House some 13 years ago, more specifically on February 18, 1966, in a situation similar to this one and where Speaker Lamoureux stated in part:

Order, please. Perhaps this might be a good moment for the Chair to unburden itself of a very weighty opinion prepared following the discussion in the house on Tuesday, February 15, when hon. members were invited to argue the point of order raised by the hon. member for Cumberland.

The Chair undertook to give a decision after considering the arguments submitted. I can assure hon. members that I have studied most carefully the several views expressed by those who participated in the discussion on the point of order.

As hon. members know, it has been the practice for some years that when a minister of the Crown makes an announcement or a statement of government policy on motions, a spokesman for each of the parties in opposition of the government may comment briefly.

● (1740)

Beauchesne refers to this practice in citation 91 of his fourth edition. On February 1, 1954, Mr. Speaker Beaudoin stated that it was the practice of the house, when a minister makes a statement, to allow one spokesman for each opposition party to make observations, and he referred to a ruling in that regard made by his predecessor, Mr. Speaker Macdonald, on June 4, 1951.

That confirms what I was saying earlier.

Last year, that practice was incorporated in our standing orders and now constitutes provisional Standing Order 15(2) which says in essence:

On motions listed in section (2) of this Standing Order, a minister of the Crown may make an announcement or statement on government policy. That kind of announcement or statement should be limited to the fact that it is thought necessary to bring it to the attention of the House. It should not be designed to bring about a debate at that stage. A spokesman for each of the parties in opposition may make brief comments subject to the same restriction.

Closer to us, in 1963, an amendment was made to the Senate and House of Commons Act which reads as follows:

It was to pay a supplementary allowance to party leaders, but that is not the point. It was suggested that provisional Standing Order 15(2) should not be interpreted in the light of the 1963 amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act and that the Speaker should use that amendment as a guideline for the procedure to be followed on the matter of comments on minister's statements, and all the more, at the time of the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. However, we must not forget the following principle of parliamentary procedure as provided in citation 8(3) of the fourth edition of Beauchesne.

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

(3) "In the interpretation of the rules or standing orders the House is generally guided, not so much by the literal construction of the orders themselves as by the consideration of what has been the practice of the House with respect to them."

We must not forget that after the 1963 amendments to the Senate and House of Commons Act, the House agreed to Standing Order 2, and the same year that this standing order was approved, the House decided, and I would like hon. members to listen to the decision of Speaker Lamoureux. The House allowed the hon. member for Red Deer to comment on the statements of ministers even though at that time his party had fewer members than the number provided in the amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act. The Speaker said that in view of the precedents, he could not see how he could conclude that Standing Order 15(2) should be interpreted according to the amendment to the said act.

Moreover, the Speaker did not believe that it would be reasonable to conclude that independent members are covered by Standing Order 15(2). He did not believe either that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River, who had taken part in the debate, should be considered as such. But as long—and this is what the Chair wanted to draw to the attention of the House—as long as the House does not amend the Standing Order concerning statements by ministers to define better the right to comment on such statements, the Speaker believed that he should follow the practice established during the last session and state that the standing orders authorize the Leader of the Official Opposition and the spokesmen for the New Democratic Party, the Ralliement Cr ditiste and the Social Credit Party of Canada to comment on statements by ministers.

At the time of that decision, there was a division in the party and the Ralliement Cr ditiste had nine members. The Social Credit Party of Canada, led by Mr. Thompson, member of Parliament for Red Deer, counted five members.

The Speaker decided, however, to recognize that group of five, pursuant to the Standing Orders, and to give them the same privileges, the same right as to those who had nine, fifteen or a hundred members. I should not like to be racist, but the Speaker who recognized those legitimate rights to an English-speaking group was a Francophone. Today the roles have changed. In order to avoid useless frictions, let us think seriously that we are members from the province of Quebec, but Quebec is part of Canada and I want it to remain so. That is why we shall need harmony and—

An hon. Member: You are not the only one.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Indeed not, but I am an individual among others, just as you yourself are only an individual among others.

An hon. Member: We were elected.