

Election of Speaker

officer. Over the years, great parliamentarians have ennobled this office substantially. The prescription given by Speaker Yelverton in 1597 during the reign of Elizabeth I is clearly no longer adequate:

Your Speaker ought to be a man big and comely, stately and well-spoken; his voice great, his carriage majestic, his nature haughty, and his purse plentiful.

[Translation]

In addition to the responsibility for presiding over the debates, the Speaker is also the guardian of the privileges of the House and its Members. He is responsible for interpreting the Standing Orders and parliamentary procedure, and from time to time acts as arbitrator or judge.

He also represents the House in its external relations, but first and foremost, he is the servant of the House and is elected by its Members. This is a practice that has remained unchanged since Confederation. The House may, however, change the Standing Orders or parliamentary procedure as it sees fit.

[English]

I am very conscious as I stand here that it is not easy to be a good Speaker and that the responsibilities will call for all of the strength and abilities I may possess.

[Translation]

Although Speakers of the House of Commons are necessarily politicians, all Hon. Members may rest assured that I shall be the Speaker of the whole House and defend the rights and privileges of all its Members. I shall try to be always impartial, independent and fair in my decisions.

[English]

The first and best definition of the supreme duty of a Speaker comes to us, in the words used by the Prime Minister, from Speaker William Lenthall. Let me tell you the story because it is illustrative. In 1642, King Charles I broke all constitutional accords and entered the House of Commons with an armed escort seeking five Members of the House whom he claimed were guilty of treason. Not finding them, the King demanded of Speaker Lenthall that he tell the King where those Members were. Speaker Lenthall, risking everything including his head, quietly spoke the words from which we date the true independence of this office and of this place:

May it please Your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place, but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here.

He survived.

[Translation]

I shall need the support of all my colleagues and will have to work constantly to obtain and preserve the trust of the House. Without that support and without that trust, no Speaker can perform his duty successfully. I do not claim to have mastered the intricacies of parliamentary procedure. I can assure the House that I have already started to study the matter, although I am sure Hon. Members will understand why the casting vote, for instance, is not one of my priorities.

[English]

Regarding procedure, let me say that we are all most fortunate to have the services of Dr. Koester and his colleagues. I am especially grateful to have the wise counsel of the Hon. Stanley Knowles.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: They have already demonstrated to me their wisdom and knowledge and I have been deeply impressed by them.

I know I can expect more from them than was offered to a British Speaker who occupied the chair many years ago. He told the story of how, having been newly elected, he faced a difficult situation in the House and sent a note to the Clerk asking "What do I do now?" The Clerk sent back a note which read: "If I were you, I should proceed with caution!"

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Finally, if I may be permitted one or two personal notes, I would like personally to welcome back all of the re-elected Members and welcome all of the newly elected Members. I hope we will all get to know each other well. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my family and my friends, some of whom are here today, and to my electors for their support and counsel, for this is a time of great change for me.

As deeply grateful as I am for this honour done me today, you will understand that I am even more grateful and blessed that an extraordinary, wonderful and gentle woman did me an even greater honour just a few days ago.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Those of you who know my wife know she very much makes her own decisions. I think I can say, however, that in choosing this inadequate person to be your Speaker, Hon. Members can take some comfort from the thought that what you see may not be all you get.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

SITTING SUSPENDED

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the sitting be suspended until three o'clock this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: The House has heard the suggestion of the Right Hon. the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). Is it agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: This sitting stands suspended until three o'clock p.m. this day.

At 12 noon the sitting was suspended.