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1901-10-30

Senate.

The President took the Chair at 2.30 p.m. and read prayers.

MOTION OF CENSURE

Special Adjournment

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Vice-President of the Executive Council

Senator O'CONNOR

. - As the motion which has been the cause of our adjournment hitherto is still pending in another place, I move -

That the Senate, at its rising, adjourn until Wednesday next.

In doing so, I may state that, although there is a probability that the debate on the motion in another place will be concluded on Thursday night, as we hope it will, still, as we cannot be certain of that, I do not think it is worth while to bring the members of the Senate back here on the possibility of being able to do one day's work on Friday.

Senator HIGGS

- I do not suppose that an amendment that the House should adjourn until to-morrow would be likely to be carried, but I am satisfied that members of the Senate now see what a mistake it was for us to adjourn a fortnight ago-

Senator Sir John Downer

- It will not be done again.

Senator HIGGS

- Honorable senators have spoken of constitutional procedure, but inasmuch as our Constitution is unique, and there has been no procedure to speak of so far, no constitutional procedure can be relied upon in this case. I regret that we did not see our way clear to go on with business, and especially business of a non-party character, such as has been mentioned by honorable senators. I feel, for instance, that we might very well have put in our time in considering the draft standing orders. They have taken the standing orders committee several months to draw up, and, under present conditions, it appears very unlikely that they can be dealt with until the next session of the Federal Parliament, seeing that we have so much to do in connexion with the Elections Bill, the Alien Immigration Restriction Bill, the Pacific Islands Labourers Bill, the Post and Telegraph Bill, the Public Service Bill, and a number of other measures of very great importance. When this question crops up again, as no doubt it will in the years to come, I shall ask that you, Mr. President, than whom there is no greater authority on constitutional procedure in the Federal Parliament, shall give us your opinion as to whether the Senate should adjourn when a motion of this kind is before the other House. I have no doubt that some members of the Senate, who belong to a particular party, may have thought that, if the Senate did not adjourn when this motion was being discussed in another place, it would have been a reflection on their party, and that the Senate by adjourning would to some extent magnify the importance of that motion.

Senator Clemons

- Is it the Government party that the honorable senator is speaking of?

Senator HIGGS

- No, to be candid, I may mention that I have Senator Clemons' party in view. I have no doubt that Senator Clemons' free-trade party would consider that if the Senate went on with its business it would be to some extent an indignity, and a reflection upon the mover of the motion in the other Chamber..

Senator Charleston

- Not at all !

Senator HIGGS

- I do not know, but I am inclined to think that, as a matter of fact, the motion originated in the free-trade party in this Senate.

Honorable Senators. - No

Senator HIGGS

- I am inclined to think that some of the strong men in this Senate put up Mr. Reid to move this motion.

That is what I mean to say. I am sorry that other members of the Senate have not had a keener appreciation of their duty to the Commonwealth, of the fact that we have a great deal of important legislation which should be attended to, and of the fact that there were plenty of other means which the free-trade party might have adopted for the purpose of doing its educational work, without hanging up the business of the Commonwealth in this way.

Senator WALKER

- Although I belong to the party the honorable senator has referred to, I may say that I am in accord with the honorable senator in saying that we ought to go on with business. Looking to what has occurred during the past fortnight, I think that we acted rather unwisely, and probably the Vice-President of the Executive Council is of a similar opinion.

Senator O'Connor

- No.

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Senator WALKER

- We cannot consistently act otherwise now, but I hope the action taken on this occasion will not be considered a precedent for all future time. We must remember that we have senators here from distant States, such as Western Australia and Queensland, and it is very unsatisfactory to - them to feel that the session will probably be prolonged for a fortnight owing to the delay which has taken place. Personally I have always received the greatest courtesy from the Government, and I do not complain of them, but I think the precedent is an unfortunate one.

Senator Higgs

- Then let us vote against the motion.

Senator CHARLESTON

- As we have responsible government, I fail to see how we can do otherwise than adjourn, but I think these proceedings must have led a good many of us to question whether in the Federal Parliament we should have responsible government, or whether it would not be more advisable for us to have elective Ministers. I am inclined to think that in the not far distant future we may have elective Ministers, and then this Senate would form an independent Chamber. Whilst we are, as at present, dependent upon the other House for Government representatives in this Chamber, I fail to see how we can become the independent Chamber that the framers of the Constitution evidently contemplated, and that the people of Australia thought we should become.

Senator O'Connor

- That is a splendid subject for a Friday discussion.

Senator CHARLESTON

- So long as the honorable and learned senator favours the idea of elective Ministers we shall have an excellent chance of carrying it out. At present we have a responsible Ministry, and the position is not quite fair to the Senate, inasmuch as we have only one paid Minister in this Chamber, and it is impossible for the Senate to be able to take the place which the people of the Commonwealth expected it would take. I believe that in future we shall have to adopt the principle of an elective rather than a responsible Ministry, and we can then conduct our business in this Senate in the manner we think best, and without the delays we are now subjected to.

Senator MACFARLANE(Tasmania).I should like to say that, as a member of the party referred to by Senator Higgs, I disclaim any wish to have these adjournments. I have all along been anxious that the business should be gone on with. As to the free-trade party in the Senate leading Mr. Reid that is a matter which I think need not be gone into.

Question - put. The Senate divided -

15

AYES

7

NOES

Majority 8

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

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14:46:00

Senate adjourned at 2.46 p.m.