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1901-08-07

Senate

The President took the chair at 3.30 p.m., and read prayers.

DEMISE OF THE DOWAGER

EMPRESS OF GERMANY

Address of Condolence!: Adjournment op the House.

The PRESIDENT

- I have with regret to announce to the Senate that since its last meeting we have heard from Europe of the demise of one of the daughters of our late lamented Queen Victoria, the Dowager Empress of Germany, who was a good friend to England, the land of her birth. Her death, I am sure, we all deeply deplore, not only for our own sake, hut also for the sake of her relatives, amongst whom is included her brother, His Majesty the King of England.

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Postmaster-General

Senator DRAKE

. - I think it will be gratifying to the Senate to know that there will be placed on its records an expression of the feeling of deep regret with which the news just announced has been received, and of sympathy with His Majesty the King in the loss he has sustained. There are, I have no doubt, some honorable senators whose memories may go back to the time when the Princess Royal of England was betrothed to the Crown Prince of Prussia, afterwards the Emperor Frederick. That alliance I think fulfilled the high expectations that were formed of it. It was the means of bringing into closer touch the people of two great nations of kindred origin. The influence of the Dowager Empress we may be perfectly sure, was at all times used in tha right direction, and I think I may say that in her court life she proved herself- to be a worthy daughter of the august lady whose memory we still mourn, Queen Victoria. If yesterday had been a sitting day I should have moved that the Senate adjourn, as a mark of respect and sympathy. The House of Representatives adjourned yesterday, and both Houses of the State Parliament also adjourned. I think now it will be fitting, and I am sure I am voicing the desires of honorable senators, that we should pass a resolution expressive of our regret and of our sympathy with His Majesty the King. "With concurrence I move -

That the following address to His Majesty the King bo agreed to on the part of this House : - >

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty. Most Gracious Sovereign, -

We the President and members of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia- in Parliament assembled have received, with heartfelt sorrow the new* of the death of your august sister, Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Dowager of Germany, and Princess Royal of England.

We are confident that we give expression bo the deep sympathy which your subjects throughout this Commonwealth feel- for , your Majesty in the great loss which has befallen you, ana we assure yon that our words accord with the loyal -affection for your Majesty which animates the people of Australia.

That this Address be presented by the President to his Excellency the Governor-General for transmission to His Majesty through the Bight' Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Senator Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD (Victoria). - In seconding this motion in the -'absence of Senator Sir Josiah Symon, who otherwise probably would do it, I need hardly say that we are all animated by a feeling of 'the deepest sympathy with our King. This death is one of no ordinary occurrence. As you, sir, . properly pointed out, the late Empress was a daughter of Britain, and one of her most beloved daughters. Those who recollect her marriage know that it was always ft happy one. In Her childhood, in her maidenhood,- in her married life, and in her widowhood she always was popular, and-, if I may use the word, beloved by the people of the- old country and by those connected with the old country, and the least we can do in the circumstances is to record our deep- sympathy in the manner indicated. I am sorry that I cannot agree with the Postmaster-General in his suggestion that- the business of the Senate should be continued. We should do more than merely place on record an expression of our feelings. I see no reason- why the Senate should be an exception to the action taken by the two State- Houses- and the House of Represen-tatives. It is but due to ourselves to follow, the example which has been set by the House of Representatives and by all the States Houses. I hope that the Postmaster-General will not ask

us to continue the business to-day, but that he will at once adopt what I venture to say, so far as my experience goes, for many years has been the invariable rule in such cases - move the adjournment of the House as a mark of respect.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Senator DRAKE (Queensland - the Postmaster-General) - I have no objection to moving the adjournment of the Senate. I endeavoured to consult the feelings of honorable senators, and there was a feeling on the part - of some that yesterday was the appropriate day for the adjournment of the Houses of Parliament, and it was only through the accident of its not being one of our sitting days that the Senate was not also formally adjourned. But I think it is fitting, if we have to run the risk of erring, that we should err on the right side, and if there is a feeling on the part of any honorable senators, as I understand there is, that we should adjourn today, I would ask those who may hold the contrary opinion to allow on this occasion that it is better that we should give effect to that desire. I move -

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Senator STEWART

- Mr. President-

The PRESIDENT

- Strictly speaking this question ought not to be debated, but this is an exceptional occasion.

Senator STEWART

- I think the Government is very ill-advised in departing from its original intention. - My opinion is that the Senate has exhausted its duty by placing on its records its sense of the loss experienced by the death of the Dowager Empress of Germany. If we had been sitting in the ordinary course of things yesterday, I do not know that I should have offered any objection to an adjournment.

Senator Sir John Downer

- Can there be a debate on: this motion ?

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The PRESIDENT

- Strictly speaking there should be no debate; but this is an exceptional occasion, and the Postmaster-General was allowed to offer some remarks.

Senator STEWART

- I am merely expressing my own opinion on the matter. I speak with no disrespect to the deceased member of the Royal Family. If I had intended to take up a position hostile to the original motion, I would have done so. I certainly had not the slightest idea that such a thing was contemplated as that the Senate should adjourn on the present occasion. I would like honorable senators just to consider the state of business. It is all very good for Senator Sargood and Senator Barrett, who live in Melbourne and are at home, and who can attend to their private affairs every day, to adjourn the business of the Senate whenever it suits them, or whenever the occasion seems to require it. But I would like them to consider those who come here from the ends of the Continent. I come from Queensland, and it is absolutely impossible for me to go to the place from which I come, except at the end of the session, without neglecting the business of the country which I was sent here to do.

Senator Drake

- This will not affect the length of the session in the slightest degree.

Senator STEWART

- That may be true but it may possibly affect the legislation which is passed. I have had some experience in legislating; and so has the honorable and learned gentleman, who knows that in Queensland we had the very same state of things as we appear to have here, a constant dawdling during the first two or three months of the session, and then a precipitate rush towards the end. As a consequence, legislation of the most unsatisfactory kind was carried. We are just entering upon a course of the same kind here. We are following the pernicious example of other Legislatures. We are asked on the present occasion to adjourn for the reason already stated. I am distinctly opposed to any adjournment; and I may tell honorable senators that I am going to oppose the present practice of the Senate not sitting earlier in the week than Wednesdays. I think we should sit on Tuesdays.

The PRESIDENT

- The honorable senator should confine himself to the motion.

Senator STEWART

- I quite recognise that what I have just said is beyond the question, but I think it comes very badly from some honorable senators to object to my stating my opinion on the subject, when I have heard others digress much more from questions before the Senate. Instead of adjourning, we should, get on with the business of the country. Are not the newspapers complaining every day about the way in which business is being attended to ? I cannot take up my Age or Argus without reading complaints as to the manner in which the Commonwealth Parliament is doing its business. Day after day it is pointed out that we sit here and turn ourselves into a debating society. We are simply wasting the time and money of the country and exhausting the patience of the people of the Commonwealth. We are now going to add to those sins - if they are sins ; I do not know that they are - by piling one more on top of the others. There is any amount of business before the Senate. There are several Bills upon the notice-paper, and there ought to be several more. We should be honouring the dead member of the Royal Family far more by getting on with the business which the Commonwealth sends us here to do, than by -adjourning. As I have already said, I take up this stand not out of any disrespect to the late Princess Royal, but for the reason that we cannot afford to have such adjournments. While we are cooped up here in Melbourne - which may be very satisfactory to some honorable -senators - our affairs are being left unattended to in the places from which we come. It is not alone honorable senators ,from Queensland .who are affected. There are others from Tasmania and Western Australia who are in the same position. Senator Lt. -Col. Neild looks at me rather threateningly. I suppose he is thinking of calling the military out. .

The PRESIDENT

- The honorable senator must confine himself to the question. Calling out the military has nothing to do with it. Indeed, the whole debate is absolutely out of order.

Senator STEWART

- I have got my
Tights here.

Senator Sir John Downer

- I rise to a point of order. The honorable senator says he has his rights, and he should have every right he possesses. But I submit that under the standing orders there -can be no debate on the motion that the Senate do now adjourn.

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The PRESIDENT

- That view is strictly correct ; but inasmuch as this is a very exceptional circumstance, and as I permitted the -Postmaster-General to make some remarks, I do not see. how I can stop any other senator. At the same time, I would ask honorable senators to confine themselves strictly to the question at issue, and not to bring in collateral and side questions.

Senator STEWART

-I am sorry that any honorable senator should attempt to close my mouth by saying what can be done under the standing orders. Does the honorable and learned senator, Sir John Downer, put himself above the President? You, sir, have allowed me to go on, and yet this honorable and learned senator from South Australia has the effrontery to get up and suggest that I should be silenced. I am glad that you, sir, have not stopped me, and that the Senate has not demeaned itself by lending itself to any proceedings of that character. Surely I am entitled to give my reasons why no adjournment should take place ?

Senator Major Gould

- Question.

Senator STEWART

- I have been speaking to the question all the time. Apparently the course I am taking is not agreeable to some honorable senators, but, as I have said, I am entitled to express my opinion clearly. When I look around the Senate I find that a number of honorable senators can get home at the end of every week. Those senators are by no means anxious that the business of the country should go on. They are, apparently, much more anxious to get to their homes every Friday afternoon, coming back on Wednesday, than to see the business done for which the Commonwealth Parliament has been called together.

The PRESIDENT

- The honorable senator should confine himself to the question.

Senator STEWART

- With all deference, I think I am confining myself to the question. I am pointing out the state of affairs which leads to what I call dawdling in the transaction of the business of the Commonwealth. A number of 'us are compelled to sit here constantly, while another section of the Senate can go home at the end of every week. That section is continually hindering public business. This running home week after week means that some senators have to wait here until it suits the convenience of others to come back and attend to their duties. I enter my protest against the adjournment, and will oppose every such adjournment on every occasion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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14:32:00

Senate adjourned at 2.32 p.m.