

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 24, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

[English]

POINT OF ORDER

USE OF UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point of order at the outset of the proceedings today with respect to the language used by the Hon. Member for York South-Weston (Mr. Nunziata) during the Question Period on Friday, March 21. When I called for a point of order at that time with respect to the language of the Hon. Member, you responded that you had not heard the language to which I had taken exception.

In light of the seriousness of this point of order, I felt obliged to await the publication of the official record of the day so that I could determine whether the words had been captured by *Hansard* during the course of Question Period.

Mr. Speaker, if you will look at page 11745 of *Hansard* of last Friday, you will see that the Hon. Member made an interjection while the Hon. Member for Egmont (Mr. Henderson) was asking a question of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). His reference to the Prime Minister is on the record. You will no doubt recall, Mr. Speaker, that his interjection led to disorder in the House at the time, which is an appropriate indication that unparliamentary language and disorder in this House should be dealt with in the usual way.

I can draw your Honour's attention to the many precedents set by yourself and your predecessors in office with respect to the unacceptability of the use of the word "liar" in the House of Commons. That is founded in a very fine and honourable tradition in this House, inasmuch as it is a protection of the use of free speech in the House without the interjection of character assassination of any Member of the House. We are all Hon. Members and should regard each other as such.

This is a matter of such importance that it must be dealt with so that it does not occur again and is not condoned. I am sure you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that if the Hon. Member absolutely withdraws this remark when he arrives in the House, that will close this particular incident.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Page 11745 of *Hansard* was brought to my attention early this morning as well. The Hon. Member for York South-Weston (Mr. Nunziata), to whom the saying is attributed, is neither in the House nor on the Hill today. I would like the Chair to wait until the Member returns, and at that time to ask him whether or not he uttered the words attributed to him, and then to see what the Member would like to do with this. I, personally, would like to have had the point raised when the Member was in the House last

Friday when the event allegedly occurred, or at another time when the Member is here. I do not think it is worthwhile for us to speak of a would-be situation when the Member involved in that particular situation is not present. I would like to say no more than to ask the Chair to wait until the Member returns.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the comment attributed to the Member for York South-Weston (Mr. Nunziata) at the time. I have also had the opportunity to review *Hansard* as a result of comments made over the weekend in the media. I think the request of the Member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault) is appropriate. The Member must surely first be asked to affirm whether or not words attributed to him are in fact words which he is prepared to be responsible for, since the action taken at the time by the Government House Leader did not result in the Speaker admonishing the Member at that moment.

I want to say two things. I think that from time to time there is a tendency on the part of Members to say things which ought not to be said, and to use language which would be better not used. I hope that every Member pays attention to that. It is possible to raise difficult questions without resorting to slander or other kinds of character depreciation.

However, in reviewing this matter I find that the Speaker has on a number of occasions made it clear that not only must the offensive word have been used by the Member, but must have resulted in some form of disorder. I am not at all certain that that applies in this case. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that it becomes the responsibility of the Speaker to request that the Member for York South-Weston indicate whether he accepts responsibility for the words appearing in *Hansard*. Having accepted that responsibility, I would hope the Member would accept the further responsibility of withdrawing that allegation in order to avoid any disorder now occurring, which could well be the case if he refused to take that appropriate step.

[Translation]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, but this time on a more technical matter. You did not hear the comment and neither did I, but we all know that the proceedings of the House are now recorded both electronically, which means what is said in the House is taped, and by the stenographers who are here in the House and who also record what are called interjections.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the problems we had in the House when you failed to hear comments made by other Members, if the electronic *Hansard* as reproduced in the proceedings for the day is correct, then that is where the comment was read,