

Point of Order—Mr. Deans

● (1530)

Madam Speaker: I think I have to dispose immediately of the arguments brought forward by the Hon. Member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) because he did use—I do not think it was a ruling but an admonition I was making to Hon. Members as they were presenting their petitions. I reminded Hon. Members that they should not debate while presenting a petition. I was simply admonishing their Members who go on for an excessive period of time describing petitions, debating in fact, when the only thing they are allowed to do when presenting a petition to the House is to give the title of the petition or something of the substance of it. That argument I have to dispose of because I do not think it is relevant to the situation we are discussing.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. Should this occurrence of yesterday prevail, as my colleague from Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) has already said, a member of the Treasury bench can eliminate the Question Period, Questions on the Order Paper, Private Members' Bills, Government Bills, Petitions and even motions.

Mr. Pinard: The House can.

Mr. Benjamin: Routine Proceedings, Madam Speaker, by their very definition mean routine. They are firm and they are fixed, except the House by unanimous consent can do anything it wants with Routine Proceedings or with anything else in this Chamber.

If this practice were to prevail, then the Government or anyone else can say that Parliament cannot exist when Members on all sides are prevented from exercising a right, as my colleague from Hamilton Mountain said which is inherent by practice and by history. Only Members of the Treasury benches need to be in this place if what I heard yesterday is to prevail. All other Members from both sides of the Chamber may as well proceed to their home constituencies and stay there.

The Government House Leader mentioned the word "dilatory". What is dilatory about an authentic petition with the actual signatures of citizens who exercise the right to petition their Parliament and their Sovereign through their Parliament?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I have to stop the Hon. Member because I want these arguments to be put to me so I can decide on the question. I will not allow Hon. Members to go beyond the scope of this discussion. The Hon. President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), when he spoke of dilatory practices, was not saying that petitions were dilatory. He was saying that the motion to proceed to Orders of the Day had to be considered as a dilatory motion or the contrary, a motion to advance to Proceedings of the House.

Mr. Pinard: That is what I said.

Madam Speaker: I do not think the Government House Leader referred to petitions as being dilatory.

Mr. Lewis: That is right.

Madam Speaker: As we all know, it is the right of Members to present petitions.

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, you have helped me very much with what you have just said. Whether the presentation of petitions is dilatory or whether the Minister wants to be dilatory himself in terms of how he deals with the Routine Proceedings of this Chamber, it seems to me the Minister is drawing a very long bow without an arrow in it. May I remind Hon. Members on the other side that when—I did not say if but when—they are in opposition, as they will be whether after the next election or ten elections from now, they will regret what happened yesterday because then any member of the Treasury benches can prevent anything from happening under Routine Proceedings in this Chamber. If Routine Proceedings do not mean Routine Proceedings, why are they on the Order Paper every day?

An Hon. Member: Why don't we all go home?

Mr. Benjamin: Where does this stop, Madam Speaker? If 280 Members of this Chamber—I will leave out Madam Speaker and I will leave out the Prime Minister—by some accident each had a petition to present on a given day, it would take up the remaining time of the Chamber that day, the following day and the day after. Would the House Leader then rise in his place and move to proceed to Orders of the Day, interrupting the presentation of petitions of citizens of our country by Members of Parliament from all sides of the House? Surely, Madam Speaker, yesterday's occurrence, which because it was the first time—and I submit it was illegal—caught Members on all sides, except the Government House Leader, with some degree of surprise and shock, cannot be allowed to prevail unless you want this Parliament to become impotent, a shambles and chaotic.

I submit the points made by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans), and the House Leader for the Conservative Party are well taken. I ask on behalf of Members on all sides that that kind of motion should not be allowed. The very presentation of it means debate at a point where debate is not allowed and it is totally out of order. Just the presentation of the motion is debate, and that is not allowed during the presentation of petitions.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, I too was on my feet yesterday to present a petition when the Government House Leader put forward his motion which was accepted by Your honour pursuant to Standing Order 50, as you then stated. I certainly want to concur with the remarks of the House Leader of my Party and other speakers who have indicated that we are talking about a motion which goes right to the nature of Parliament and indeed to the nature of parliamentary democracy itself.