

the operation of Parliament itself and the rights of citizens. The thrust of the Bill of the hon. gentleman is to see to it that something happens with a petition and a response is made to a petition of any one or more citizens of this country.

I suppose this is a matter which distresses all Hon. Members. It has been a rare occasion when Parliament has in fact dealt with or responded to a petition. I believe the Hon. Member cited a couple of occasions. I can recall one that had a massive impact on Members on all sides and which resulted in Government action. The Government chose to cite the petition as one of the reasons for its action. Many years ago, Hon. Members from the CCF Party presented a petition with respect to old age pensions, comprising approximately 150,000 to 200,000 signatures. The Government of the day, in subsequent months and years, in bringing about legislation concerning old age pensions, albeit inadequate, chose to cite the petition as being one of the reasons for doing it. That would be one of the rare examples where something resulted from the presentation of a petition.

● (1710)

Therefore, the question is: What is done with those petitions? I have been finding some interesting reading on the subject since I noticed the Hon. Member's Bill. I refer to "The People and the Constitution" by C.F. Emden, the second edition, at page 75, which states: "In December, 1679, Shaftesbury was astute enough to realize that petitions could be effectively used as a weapon in party warfare; and his Green Ribbon Club organized a vast campaign for the collection of signatures to petitions in favour of"—would Hon. Members believe it?—"the assembly of Parliament." This relates to some remarks made by the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan (Mr. McRae). Of course, when there is an extra-large or a controversial issue before the nation, there will, of course, be an upsurge in petitions—I also say this for the benefit of the Chair, and of the Table Officers—there will be such an upsurge that it may well annoy the Chair or the Table Officers. It may well annoy the Government. It may well annoy the whole House of Commons. It may well annoy most of the country. However, in line with the hon. gentleman's Bill, I submit that the right to have some response to that petition is inviolable and is in place under Routine Proceedings in this Parliament and under our rules.

When Shaftesbury twigged on to this use of petitions as a weapon of warfare between Parties, on a political issue, it was in 1679. The next year, however, in spite of the annoyance and the massive upsurge in petitions about an assembly of Parliament, that same Parliament resolved the following:

—it is and ever hath been the undoubted right of the subjects of England to petition the King for the calling and sitting of Parliaments and the redressing of grievances.

C. F. Emden went on to state:

The Bill of Rights of 1688 maintained that "it is the right of subjects to petition the King, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal". But it was still necessary to provide against disorder in the manner of presentation of petitions;—

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Petitions to Parliament

The House of Commons, as far back as 1689 and 1699, presented a method of order in the presentation of petitions.

We have a method of order for the presentation of petitions under the Routine Proceedings of this Parliament. In fact, there is a method of order which is not included in our routine orders. Chambers Encyclopedia states this at pages 628 and 629:

Petition is a supplication preferred to one capable of granting it. The right of the British subject to petition the sovereign or either house of parliament for the redress of grievances is a fundamental principle of the British constitution and has been exercised from very early times.

By the way, a Canadian citizen is included in the term "British subject". It continues to read:

The practice of petitioning the house of commons first became frequent in the reign of Henry IV.

The following is what should perhaps be included in our Routine Proceedings:

A member of the House of Commons, having orally presented a petition, deposits it by placing it in a bag kept for the purpose at the back of the Speaker's chair. Petitions may be informally presented by members by placing them in this bag.

If you look behind your Chair, Mr. Speaker, you will notice that there is no place for a bag in which to deposit petitions. In the present practice, we only go through the motions of petitioning, the right to petition, with the rare exceptions cited by the Hon. Member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger) and the one which I have cited. Even on those rare occasions when something has resulted from the presentation of a petition, the Government then cites those petitions because it suits its case, because it happens to suit the policy of the Government of the day. That is fair ball. I am not objecting to that.

That being the case and the practice, then I ask: What about answering petitions which do not agree with either the Government policy or the opinion of the House? What happens to them after they are presented? Concerning the automatic referral of a petition to an appropriate standing committee, first, as the Hon. Member proposes in his Bill, there would be a response of some kind from the Government within two weeks. The Government has the perfect right to accept or reject a petition of grievance or a request for redress, whether it conforms with or is opposed to Government policy. Actually, any Government of any Party would hasten to cite a petition in support of its case if it agreed with its policy. The question is, what is done with a petition if it does not agree with the policy of the Government or the views of the House? The petitioners are entitled to have something done with their petitions and to receive or reply to it. Even if they do not like the reply, they are entitled to it.

I would like to speak of the occurrence of several days ago and those others which have occurred from time to time when dealing with the Criminal Code amendments and other matters. From 1968 through to 1970, I remember our colleagues from le Ralliement des Cr ditistes rising in their places day after day with petitions on Criminal Code amendment respecting abortions. The House patiently heard them out. There were also such occasions during the time of the War