

Point of Order—Mr. McKinnon

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy House Leader made the claim that when I presented my petition in the House today I misrepresented that petition. He also mentioned something about “sticking to the words”. Are we to say, therefore, that the only way to represent a petition accurately is to stick to the exact words, or is there another test, that being the communication of the meaning of the petition?

Mr. Lewis: Oh, I see, the interpretation.

Mr. Keeper: This is the fundamental question of what is “representation” and what is “misrepresentation”. I would suggest that the accurate communication of meaning is a fair representation of a petition. With that in mind, I will read from the “blues” which I had to get from the Deputy House Leader, through whatever magical powers he has. These are the words he quoted: “The petitioners point out that the Government has caved in to the lobbying of multinational corporations”, and I will read the exact words which were in the petition which was signed by my constituents:

WHEREAS, the proposed changes are another example of the Conservative Government serving the interests of multinational corporations and increasing their profits, at the expense of Canadian consumers.

I ask you to consider, Mr. Speaker, whether that accurately represents the meaning of the words I used, to which the House Leader objects, which were “caved in”.

Mr. Lewis: Where are the words “caved in”?

Mr. Keeper: Surely that is what is meant by “serving the interests of the multinational corporations and increasing their profits at the expense of Canadian consumers”.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Keeper: Surely that is an accurate representation of the meaning.

My hon. friend quoted me as saying: “the Government has caved in to the lobbying of multinational corporations”. Every adult in this country knows that the way any interest group gains the attention of Government and gets the policy it wants from Government, is through a process which is commonly known as “lobbying”. How else does the Hon. Member imagine that those people who signed this petition think the Government arrived at its conclusion? The petition states, wherein the proposed changes are another example of the Conservative Government serving the interests of multinational corporations, increasing their profits, at the expense of ordinary Canadians.

I suggest that what I said in this House, Mr. Speaker, accurately represents the meaning of this petition. To the extent that those were the very words the Hon. Member himself used when he evaluated my words in this House, when he talked about misrepresentation and misleading, surely the same standard of test should be applied to him and his description of what I did and the way I conveyed the meaning in these documents.

Mr. Jack Shields (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I too feel honour bound to take part in the debate. As all Hon. Members of this House know, there are times when we must, on behalf of our constituents, table a petition in the House of Commons with which we may or may not agree. It may be something to which we are fundamentally opposed, but our constituents have asked us to submit a petition on their behalf. I submit that if we are allowed to stray from the wording of the petition we are tabling, we could undermine our constituents by adding or detracting from their statement. The Hon. Member for Lethbridge—Foothills (Mr. Thacker) has made the point very adequately. I only submit this, Mr. Speaker, because I am sure you have had the experience, as I have, and as have all Hon. Members here, that when you submit a petition you do not agree with, you are duty bound to do so because your constituents have asked you to submit that petition.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, I regret I was not present to hear the initiation of this debate. I listened very carefully to the intervention of my hon. colleague moments ago when he suggested certain problems might be created if we are tabling petitions with which we disagree. I would hasten to point out I could not agree more strongly with petitions which were tabled this morning.

I would like to mention that I understand that it is an abrogation of the rules of the House for someone to have acquired the “blues” in advance of their acquisition by the Hon. Member whose speech or utterances are recorded therein. I think that is a matter which should be looked into. However, it is my understanding that in the proffering of a petition Hon. Members ought to avoid repeating every word contained in the petition. That is a principle to which I tried very hard to adhere. In doing so I tried to paraphrase the contents of the petition in order to spare the House the unnecessary consumption of time. When I saw a phrase in the petition which states: “Whereas the proposed changes are another example of Canadian Government concessions to the United States at the expense of average Canadians in the free trade negotiations”, I could only think of one word to substitute for and summarize that phrase. That word was “blackmail”.

● (1530)

Mr. Chuck Cook (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I have heard enough of this nonsense. I simply say to the Chair with the greatest of respect that the duty of the Speaker in this regard, and I would like to go back to first principles, is with respect to the question of privilege raised by the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon). I think out of their own mouths members of the New Democratic Party have condemned themselves and, quite frankly, have pointed out that what they said was not what was contained in the petitions.