

which has been refused by the majority of the special joint committee on the constitution. That is the question of privilege we are raising today.

It therefore follows that when discussing a revision of the constitution we are dealing with a substantial question. It is clear that such discussions involve, not only for Quebec but for all other Canadian provinces, the right of self-determination. However, hon. members have no other channels for stating their views than the normal legislative institution, which they control. They are therefore muzzled and unable to express their opinions, even diverging, otherwise than by their remarks or their vote within the committee—neither in the report nor in the House.

According to the normal regulations to which I referred previously, the Standing Orders obviously do not as yet authorize minority reports, a fact to be deplored in 1972, an era of such critically serious problem. And, what is worse, in this case the majority report deliberately ignores dissidence.

The procedure established for the Committee on External Affairs and National Defence represents an eminently noteworthy precedent and in my opinion dissident members have been denied their fundamental rights.

In fact, it might happen that a group of members of the Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs Committee, engaged in a study of the Canadian banking system, would want its opinions on monetary reform to be taken into account. If a similar right is denied today to members of the Committee on the Constitution, it will mean, to all intents of purposes, that members of the Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs Committee would likewise be unable to bring forward the concept of a monetary reform through the channels of the parliamentary institutions they control. Thus, their only means of having their views considered would be through action outside the House and the committees, which is quite incompatible with the definition of Parliament, a democratic institution in the highest sense of the word, where the minority is and should continue to be respected. Under that system, the Canadian people can express their views through their spokesmen, the members of Parliament.

This shows how important this question is. We are now dealing with a basic issue which the Chair must take into consideration when it renders its ruling.

We could also mention the reports of standing and special committees with which the government disagrees. What becomes of those reports? They remain on the shelves. And then the majority of the committee is muffled and stifled in favour of the silent majority in the House.

This is why members of our party wish to support dissenting members and to insist strongly that the rights of the minority be respected in the report without the names of the members involved being disclosed.

• (1440)

[English]

Mr. Ian Wahn (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, I should like to support the basic principle expressed by the hon. member for Charlevoix (Mr. Asselin). I should also like to empha-

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size that it should be made clear that this principle extends not only to special committees but also to the standing committees of this House—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wahn:—such as the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence to which reference has been made. We faced this problem in that committee on a number of occasions. We could find no specific precedent which would prevent the expression in our report of minority points of view, although there seemed to be a general feeling that the House did not recognize minority reports from committees. On investigation we could find no specific precedent that would prevent minority views being expressed in our reports. Therefore we made provision in several of them for minority points of view to be recorded in the main body of the reports.

We did see that some confusion might result and that the system might be open to abuse if the principle were adopted that minorities could publish separate reports on their points of view at public expense, but we did not feel that this same objection could apply where the views of the minority were recorded within the main body of the report. This was the procedure we adopted. It was based on our experience that, if we refused to permit a minority to express its point of view in the main report, that minority simply prepared a report in any event and then gave it to the press. It seemed to us much better that the minority point of view should be summarized and discussed within the committee and form part of the main report rather than have this informal procedure followed.

We think that the procedure we have adopted works well and we hope that Your Honour's ruling will recognize it as a proper procedure and that it will be extended to all the standing committees of the House.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Your Honour is receiving a great deal of useful advice and I am not going to prolong this matter unduly. One of the points raised earlier was the question of whether there was sufficient precedent within our parliamentary tradition or whether it was possible within the foundation of our parliamentary system for there to be such minority reports. Without repeating the excellent arguments put forth for the acceptance of such minority reports, I think it might be useful to consult not the Mother of Parliaments in this case but one of our sister parliaments, that of Australia. In the Senate there, which is an elected body, minority reports are permitted. In Australian Senate Practice, third edition, 1967, the following is recorded at the conclusion of Standing Order 311 relative to the preparation of a draft report:

A protest or dissent may be added to the report.

It goes on to say that the Senate considered there was considerable value in minority reports.

I think it is right and proper, as the chairman of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence has stated, that such minority reports should be included from time to time where it seems appropriate. I shall not repeat the arguments put forward by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin), the hon. member for Charlevoix (Mr. Asselin) and others with respect to the