

dum meeting weekly for months now. Our members from the province of Quebec have been present.

We had committee hearings on this particular piece of legislation and the Conservative members from the province of Quebec were present at the Friday meeting. They came back to Ottawa to be present at the Monday meetings. They came back to Ottawa to be present at the Tuesday meetings. They were the only representatives from the province of Quebec, other than the member from the Liberal Party who was present at those meetings where this issue and this piece of legislation was discussed in great detail.

I thought the people of this country would like to know. If other members had been present at the committee hearings and the House allows them to be present, the whole country should understand that they could have been there and heard the testimony related to the issues that were discussed—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lapierre: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Shefford raises a point of order. I hope it is a genuine one.

Mr. Lapierre: I think the government Whip does not do justice to his job when he says he did not see any member from the Bloc Québécois in committee. Although we did not have the right to speak—

Madam Deputy Speaker: This is not a point of order as the hon. member knows. The hon. members had the opportunity to speak on numerous occasions since we started consideration of this bill at report stage. They were recognized regularly and if there is a point of debate on which they disagree, they certainly had the opportunity to refute. I think it would be wise to let someone else take the floor since other members allowed the hon. members to talk without interruption.

The hon. member for Richelieu just completed his 10 minutes of speech. I am convinced that some hon. members disagreed with what he said but they did not rise constantly with fallacious points of order. I would ask that the same courtesy be extended to other members and that an end be put to the raising of blatantly false points of order which seem to be raised only to interrupt whoever has the floor.

Government Orders

I am going to ask the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead to withdraw. What he said was unparliamentary.

Mr. Gérin: I will abide by the decision of the Chair because the word was unparliamentary. The Whip was saying that no member of the Bloc Québécois was ever present in the constitutional committee. Friday, the day following the tabling of the bill, 10 days ago, I was there with him.

[*English*]

Mr. Hawkes: Madam Speaker, in 13 years I have never heard a member denied the right to speak at any committee. Whether they are a member of the committee or not they have always had the right and that continues today. It is part of the tradition of the place. It is part of the tradition of democracy.

Those members who were present on Monday at committee hearings heard testimony from a number of people, including the royal commission report on electoral reform and a law professor that the opposition had picked. I want to say to the Liberal deputy House leader that every witness asked for by anybody was heard by that committee. No witness was refused.

The testimony was rather clear and consistent that under the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms the democratic rights are not even subjected to the notwithstanding clause. Those democratic rights are rights which no government can override at any time in any way, whether it be provincial or federal; that is the right to vote, the right to hold office and the right to those kinds of administrative practices that enable you to activate that right. I suggest to the House that includes the notion that you must be able to associate with others to exercise those rights and influence people's votes. I suggest to the member who is moving this particular package of amendments, this is the kind of logic and the kind of practice that comes out of our history that has been around for a long time in this country, but is codified in the Constitution through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Any attempt by the Government of Canada to restrict the rights of people to associate for the purposes of influencing the outcome of a vote would, in fact, be arguable clearly before a court of law and, based on the testimony we heard in committee, would likely lead to