

*Speaker's Ruling*

There is a time honoured tradition in this place that we accept an hon. member's word.

• (1110)

The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte in his intervention in this discussion described that tradition of accepting an hon. member's word "as primary and essential to the functioning of this place" and cautioned that "if we depart from that we will be in very great difficulty in this place". The Chair is indebted to the hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for that turn of phrase and for the reasoning developed in his intervention.

In response to the parliamentary secretary's accusation that he had prior knowledge of the demonstration, the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair categorically denied that he or any member of his caucus was informed or was aware of it. He was supported in this by several members of his caucus. Even were he not, even were he to have stood alone, we in the House are bound to accept the hon. member's word—such is the nature of our institution that a member's word is paramount—and we lose sight of that at our peril.

To my mind, this aspect of the affair was concluded with the denial of the accusation by the hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair. Accordingly, I cannot find that there is any question of privilege which should be put to the House in respect of that matter.

Accordingly, it would not be appropriate to allow the parliamentary secretary to put to the House, as a privileged motion, that portion of his proposed motion that relates to the prior knowledge of the demonstration.

[*Translation*]

I should like now to turn to the demonstration itself and to a consideration of the propriety of raising that matter as a question of privilege. As I said last Thursday I listened with some comfort to representations from some members regarding the respect which we need to have for this place and which other people ought to have for it. I am pleased to accede to the suggestion of the hon. member for Saint-Denis that the Chair, at an appropriate time, remind us of what this House is all about and reinforce the seriousness of the disturbance which took place in our galleries. The hon. member for Saint-Denis, a devotee of parliamentary tradition, has a

well-developed sense of the House and its changing moods and tenors and I sincerely welcome his well-considered advice.

[*English*]

I also understand and share the fear expressed by the hon. Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House that the disturbance in our galleries might be seen as a legitimate form of political dissent and is an indication of the disrespect in which the perpetrators held this institution. Those who would safeguard their rights must be ever vigilant to insidious encroachments thereupon.

In the past, the House has usually chosen to ignore those who offended its dignity by interrupting proceedings because it was reluctant to inadvertently advertise their causes. Maingot, in *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* notes at page 203:

All kinds of misconduct in the presence of the House or of a committee may be treated as contempts on the ground that they part-take of an affront of the dignity of the House—

Misconduct or misbehaviour in the traditional sense would include acts that disrupt or have a tendency to disrupt or interrupt the House or committees by such acts as shouting, throwing objects, waving placards—Many instances have occurred where disorderly conduct has taken place, even to the extent of temporarily suspending the House, but the general position of the House is that the dignity of the House would be best served by taking no action in such cases—The House is reluctant to take action against those attempting to disrupt the proceedings in this way because of the attendant publicity it would provide them.

Perhaps the time has come to re-examine our practice in this regard. If so, that is for the House to decide. What the Chair must decide at this point is whether the motion put forward by the hon. parliamentary secretary, now stripped as it is of any reference to prior knowledge of the demonstration, is to be accorded privileged treatment.

Were I to decide that the question should be put to the House immediately, then the hon. parliamentary secretary would be invited to put his revised motion referring the matter of the demonstration in the galleries to the privileges and elections committee. The motion could then be debated, amended, and voted upon. Depending on the outcome of that process, it might then be considered by a committee and reappear before the House if and when the committee reported.