

Point of Order

• (1050)

You cannot reduce this to a silent Chamber. There are going to be political exchanges. There is going to be the kind of vigorous back and forth both on and off the record stuff that the House of Commons has always been and, I think, always will be. This is not a corporate board meeting where everybody agrees about what the bottom line is. This is a place where we exchange values and ideas, where we fight for things in which we believe. But we do that within certain parameters and we do that within certain rules and lately we have done it in a way that the Canadian public has found offensive.

That is one issue.

I have been here twelve and a half years and it is only in the last three or four weeks that we have had to deal with the problem that I am raising now and asking the Speaker to deal with. That is the question of open sexist and racist language. That is different from what the government House leader was talking about. That is what I ask you to address.

We are addressing the other question in the subcommittee on parliamentary reform dealing with Question Period and other things and we need to deal with that. But let us not confuse it in such a way as to bury the significance of what has happened in the last few weeks.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona. I understand perfectly well the distinction that the hon. member is raising and I am very sensitive to it.

At the same time I do ask hon. members and the public which is listening to keep in mind that the general decorum is also of importance because when that is reduced too far beyond what is acceptable, it leads to other things.

The other thing, and I repeat what I said to my hon. friend from Broadview—Greenwood and other members, is that this is a tough place. It always has been. That is not an excuse for excess, but it is and it must be remembered that the most precious things and the most vital issues that this country faces are debated here and

there will be at times expressions of great commitment, conviction and passion.

I am sure that people will understand that in a free country, provided that those expressions are done in such a way that they do not wound others or bring into indignity the institution itself, that is probably something we have always had and probably something that will continue.

The other thing I want to say to hon. members is this. What we are discussing are a couple of incidents that only took a few seconds in this Chamber out of the many hours in which debate takes place. It is no secret that most of the time in this place there is not only excellent decorum but the place is relatively calm and there is debate which is seriously proceeding.

I think on behalf of all members of the House I have to make this statement. Maybe it is a misconception to say that this place is always in excess or even in an uproar because that is not so. There is also no doubt in my mind that the public is asking us to improve.

I might just say to hon. members, remember many years ago when in order to express our approval of some brilliant move on the part of one of our colleagues or some brilliant criticism we pounded the desks. You will remember that it was shortly after television came into the House that we began, all of us, to receive letters and telephone calls saying that we should stop it.

What stopped it is that one party stopped it and substituted it with applause and within a few days it had ceased. It does not take place any more. That is an example of the House responding to public opinion.

I will not go on any longer because I can see some members are tempted to pound their desks in approval of what I have just said. That would sort of defeat the example.

I will do the very best I can, in response to the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona. I understand exactly what he is saying. I am conscious that it is a serious matter and I shall try to assist the House.