

Motion for Concurrence in Report

consider the motion of the member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) as affecting the privileges and rules of Parliament and, therefore, that you reject it.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, I rather agree with the two previous speakers. While I agree with their comments, I would like to put forward the arguments which, perhaps, they have not stressed enough.

Mr. Speaker, I think the problem is of paramount importance. In fact, the question is whether a member can influence in any way the proceedings of the House or its committees without violating the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that if the motion or the point of order of the President of the Privy Council were accepted, the Chair would seem to favour force, instead of democracy. It seems to me that for some years, the successive majority governments have been tempted, because of their numerical strength, to impose their views on the House and the committees.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to recall that members of the Opposition have always been anxious to co-operate with the government with a view to speeding up the proceedings by agreement, as the President of the Privy Council said, among the various party representatives. But this has nothing to do whatsoever with the power or basic rights of a House member.

Mr. Speaker, an attempt was made to improve committee work. I would point out two precedents of the last session to show the government's negative attitude. It will certainly be remembered that the government disagreed on the contents of a committee report and that on another occasion, it was defeated through its failure to maintain a majority in this House. The Chair was made aware of the situation. Now, on those two occasions, the President of the Privy Council stepped in and succeeded so well in imposing his views on the dispute that the matter was referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Speaker, I would humbly submit that instead of accepting the proposal of the President of the Privy Council, the Chair recommend that the subject-matter of the dispute be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections, since the rights of the members are involved.

• (2:50 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, this aspect is more important than is generally believed. It is agreed that

[Mr. Fortin.]

hon. members, the government, the opposition parties have rights.

But when we ask the ministers for information during the oral question period, we know what happens. Either we receive a haughty answer, or none at all. Hon. members cannot demand a reply, as at that moment Your Honour steps in to say that the minister can rightfully act that way. Even at the information level, the part of the private member is practically nil. It is the same within the committees. When a private member wants to say something, to put forward a motion, right away the majority principle is invoked and put in operation and he is defeated.

When a private member tries to bring in a motion giving rise to an expenditure of public funds, the Speaker says: "A private member cannot do this."

Mr. Speaker, since the adoption of Standing Orders 75A, 75B and 75c, the length of the debate is restricted and is determined by the majority in order to further reduce the part played by private members.

I suggest that this is a basic question of very great importance, and that the decision that the Chair may give shortly will protect the rights of the minority, those of private members, and not necessarily those of the strong.

In my view, some government members are really doing a good job in using their strength to crush the private members.

Now, if the part played by a private member is reduced to nothing, I wonder what we are doing here?

Mr. Speaker, you agree, I feel, that hon. members should fully and consciously do their duty, that they should take part in the discussions and bring in motions, in accordance with the Standing Orders and the practices of the house.

Hon. members are waiting for your decision, in order that their right to intervene, not to foist their views on the House concerning the order of proceedings, be protected. Hon. members honestly wish to carry out the business of the house.

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As a result of certain remarks made by the hon. member for Peace River, I feel I should clarify one or two points. Just before the Christmas recess the hon. member for Athabasca prematurely attempted to move a motion for concurrence