

There is one further comment I wish to make, although I believe the arguments I presented are convincing. We are discussing here not basically a question of procedure of the House, but a question of the rights of citizens of Canada, the right to present to the House of Commons through the method of petition, properly worded, a concern which is shared by citizens of this country. It is a hallowed and time honoured right of the citizens of this country. We should accept that the citizens of the country are not necessarily trained lawyers nor trained parliamentarians and that we as a House should be forebearing and generous in our interpretation of the words which they present to us.

I hope every member of this House will feel that when 2,000 citizens have gone through the rather time-consuming and awkward process of presenting views on which they feel strongly to the House of Commons in parliament assembled, that members would wish to know what are those views.

With the admiration, loyalty and respect I have for the Chair, I will of course accept whatever ruling you present on this issue. However, I confess I will be very saddened if through your decision today you restrict, more narrowly than precedent enjoins, upon the right of the citizens of Canada to make their views known to members of the House of Commons in parliament assembled on matters which they feel strongly.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak very briefly in support of the argument that the petition is acceptable under our rules and the precedents in that regard. I submit there is nothing in the petition which would not be acceptable if expressed in the House of Commons by members of parliament. When members speak in this House, they are speaking on behalf of the Canadian people. I submit a petition should not be rejected through interpreting the precedents in question as meaning that Canadians cannot use the same language when they petition the House of Commons as their own elected members can use when they speak in that House of Commons. I submit this petition should be accepted. To reject it on the basis of the language in it would mean that the ancient right of citizens to petition parliament would be limited. This is because we would be limited to interpreting this right according to the more limited and restrictive standards of hundreds of years ago rather than current standards acceptable to the House and to the country generally. I therefore submit that the petition be received.

● (1420)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order. If there are no other hon. members who wish to continue this interesting discussion, I would remind the House, with respect to the able and experienced members who have made contributions, that the question before us, is, of course, not one of the acceptability of the petition. The petition in its written form has been accepted; there is no restriction with respect to that form which applies to acceptance by the Clerk of the House and, in turn, by the Clerk of Petitions. Any petition which the citizens of this country wish to place before the

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House of Commons can be so placed in writing as long as it is presented in a form acceptable under the provisions. No restriction is placed on petitioners or petitions in that regard.

The question is whether we ought to carry that process one step further and allow the petition to be read. It is the right of a member presenting a petition to ask that the petition be read. However, before taking that further step I must express some concern about the contents of any petition which is proposed to be read, since in that case not only does a petition need to be in the proper form but, in addition, it should refrain from expressing an opinion with regard to the House or the government or the positions taken by members of the House, but, rather, that it should seek a redress of grievances. Petitions which have been accepted previously have sought to redress what might have been a legitimate grievance. I was curious to know whether or not it was appropriate to go further, having in mind the very terms to which the hon. member referred, one of which in particular caused me concern—the one which expressed dismay at absence of resolve on the part of the government in respect to an issue and followed by saying that the government's abstention on this issue cannot be justified.

Citation 331 of Beauchesne, the second paragraph, reads as follows:

The House of Commons is a representative institution. It only considers questions submitted by its elected members. The ordinary citizen has no right to appear personally before the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) said the language ought not to be objected to because it would be in order if it were used by an elected member of the House. But with the greatest respect to that honourable and experienced member, that is precisely the point. This is a representative institution, and the elected representatives are the ones who should carry into this chamber opinions or reflections on the performance of the government, not messages from outside brought here in some other guise. A petition which seeks to place before the House the opinions of people who are not responsible, elected members ought to be viewed in accordance with a strict interpretation.

On further examination of the precedents I would draw the attention of hon. members to the ruling to which I referred earlier, that of the previous Speaker, Mr. Lamoureaux, in June, 1972. Examining a similar petition, he went over the same ground and clearly came to the same conclusion. He said on that occasion:

In the light of what I have read and stated I wonder whether hon. members would not agree that if the allegations contained in the document were allowed to be inserted in our record, another injustice would be created.

I submit, therefore, that the Chair ought to take the very strictest view. A petition can be received here so long as it has been certified by the Clerk of Petitions to be in order as to form; there is no restriction upon that. However, to carry it further than that and to have the Clerk of the House read it gives it some force which, I submit, ought to require us to examine it and to see to it that it is free from opinion and representations which, if they are going to be made in this House, ought to be made by an