

Point of Order—Mr. MacEachen

ever hear hon. members to your right standing at three o'clock on a point of order? They invariably allow these things to pass. Why can they not use that usual ploy of giving ministers a planted question, as they so often do?

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: An hon. member says "oh, oh".

An hon. Member: Withdraw.

Mr. Alexander: Withdraw what? There is always a time for withdrawal, but we know how the system works and surely the hon. member does not want me to withdraw something like that.

Hon. members can clarify a situation or something that has happened by asking the minister concerned a question. Do we find them doing that, sir? When it comes to something regarding the Queen or a matter of contention, we finally hear something. I suggest they are otherwise all asleep, and that is where the negligence lies.

What else could hon. members on that side possibly do to correct the situation? If they were on the ball, and they have not been for at least ten years, they could issue a press release explaining the circumstances and pointing out why the hon. member who proposed the motion under Standing Order 43 was in error, as well as any shortcomings there might be.

Mr. Reid: We are trying to cut down on paperwork.

Mr. Alexander: You are not doing that. All I am suggesting is that it appears to me, for purposes I can comprehend, that hon. members opposite do not want us to speak out too forcefully. The government is trying to muzzle opposition members. Let us be very frank about the situation. There are very few opportunities for opposition members, particularly the backbenchers, as well as backbenchers on the government side, to bring their concerns not only to the House of Commons but to the people in general. Standing Order 43 provides such an opportunity.

I would not suggest there are no members who have abused the practice or misused the Standing Order. However, we should not allow the government House leader to leave the suggestion that we on this side are the only guilty ones; that is, those of us to the left of Mr. Speaker.

This debate today emphasizes one thing. It was stated earlier there was no need for this debate because the House leaders could get together and discuss the matter. I suggest that if anyone should be disciplined for abusing the Standing Order, members on both sides should be disciplined. Hon. members on the government side should not leave the impression that we on this side are the ones who are wrong, the ones who are misusing the rules, or the ones abusing the Standing Order. This is why I register my concern. We have to be very careful in matters like this.

You have a very onerous job, Mr. Speaker, but this Standing Order is very plain. It states that a member may, if he believes his case is one of urgency and of pressing need,

[Mr. Alexander.]

explain his case in terms of its urgency and pressing need and then propose a motion. That is his right. If hon. members on the government side feel the point is argumentative and you, Mr. Speaker, so rule, the hon. member does not even get a chance to continue with his motion. Government members must realize that if they want to complain they must come into this House with clean hands.

An hon. Member: That's a dangerous principle for you to espouse.

Mr. Alexander: The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) laughs. With all respect, I suggest that before they complain they should show over some period of time that they have some concern, that they are worried and feel the matter calls for action. What have hon. members opposite done? They have sat silently until a thunderbolt hit them. At that time the government House leader stood up with all his rhetoric, pleasantness and debating ability to complain about the Standing Order. His arguments were subsequently destroyed not only by my House leader but the House leader of the NDP, and I am attempting to help in that regard.

Standing Order 43 is of significance and meaning to many members of the House and it should not be tampered with lightly. We all have to learn how to respect it and how to bring about its use as was envisaged. Following this debate I hope hon. members will realize that it has served a useful purpose in terms of bringing forward the fact that there is a problem. Hopefully we can arrive at a solution acceptable to all.

I have a feeling that government members would like to make more use of Standing Order 43. I am not quite prepared to accept that idea. Those hon. members can always approach their ministers in caucus; I do not have that opportunity. The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River waves his hands indicating there is no communication there either—and therefore they want to use the time of the House for this purpose.

Let me conclude with these words given to me by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald): Let him who is without guilt cast the first stone.

An hon. Member: That's sin.

Mr. Alexander: It is guilt the way she has written it.

● (2022)

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I would not want to let this opportunity go by without making some remarks on this very hot issue. You will surely acknowledge the fact that I have often moved motions under Standing Order 43. The hon. member sitting there on my left and to your right, the parliamentary secretary, tells me so. He can speak from experience. Mr. Speaker, if I cannot speak from experience, I can at least speak from memory because I have witnessed the evolution of the House as did all my colleagues and I can say with pride and conviction that our democratic