

Privilege—Mr. Domm

Members items as being votable seriously erodes my opportunity to represent my constituents while taking away from Parliament a right that it has always had. It is in direct violation of Standing Order 96(1).

● (1540)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members will know that when a Member rises on a question of privilege, it may not always be a question of privilege. That is a matter on which the Chair must rule. However, it is usually a grievance, and I would suggest to Hon. Members that when a Member is speaking to a question of privilege, Hon. Members should that Member the courtesy of attention.

Mr. Domm: During my seven years as a Member of Parliament I have had the opportunity during four of those years to be Deputy House Leader responsible for Private Members' Business. I have never seen such a flagrant disregard for Standing Orders, and the taking away of the rights of Members of Parliament, as has been evidenced by recent decisions of a committee of the House, set up by Members of Parliament, to review votable items as they come before that committee.

The committee said that my motion was rejected because it did not have the power to: "empower the Justice Committee to study the motion". I want to remind the House that empowering a Standing Committee to review and report to Parliament is an inalienable right that all Members of Parliament have enjoyed over the years. This committee that was set up by private Members to represent their concerns has essentially told members from the New Democratic Party, members from the Progressive Conservative Party and members from the Liberal Party that we no longer have the right as Parliamentarians to vote and send what we believe is an urgent and pressing matter to a Standing Committee for study and report back to Parliament.

Let me explain how important this issue is to me, and I am sure to all Members of the House, regardless of which Party they represent. I am not in a debate with the Government I am not in a debate with my colleagues who are all back-benchers. I am not looking to the front-benches of Government to stand up and tell me why this is happening. They have never had control over Private Members' Business and they are not intended to have any control over Private Members' Business in the House. It is a private Members' committee that went to the media with a private members' issue to give the reasons why it has not accepted a motion before the decision was even tabled in the House. That back-bencher had been assured under the Standing Orders that the committee would enter into full consultation with that back-bencher in determining the priority for a votable item, having regard to that Member's motion.

A member of that Standing Committee is quoted in *The Ottawa Citizen* on Friday, November 7, as saying:

The controversial bill was also thrown out because "it simply empowered the justice committee to do what it already has the power to do—"

That was before the decision was tabled in the House and before the Member was advised of any of the reasons why that item was turned down by that committee. That is a flagrant disregard for the authority and power of a Member of the House to represent not only his constituents but all Canadians.

Let us consider other motions on the Order Paper. Motion No. 12 in the name of the New Democratic Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson), states:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General be empowered to study the question—

That motion is on the Order Paper. The purpose of this committee is to serve the back-benchers of the House. It says that Parliament no longer has the authority to direct the Standing Committee to study and report on an issue.

Not only should New Democrats reconsider whether some of their motions are eligible for a vote, Progressive Conservatives also have motions, such as Motion No. 25 standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Kent (Mr. Hardey). That motion states:

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be empowered to study and consider—

I believe we have lost a right and I want to move a motion in the House that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to determine whether Parliament, not Government, has the right to refer an item to a Standing Committee for study and report. I say to Hon. Members that if we lose this fight on this very important issue, as back-benchers in the House of Commons we lose that for which the McGrath committee fought. The Hon. Member for Peace River (Mr. Cooper), who is sitting here as a back-bencher, knows as well as every Member in the House, that it was the intent of the McGrath report to give more authority to Parliament and back-benchers, and less authority to Government. We have a role to play in the decision-making process of this nation. If we allow our peers to tell us that we do not have this authority, then we are violating Standing Order 96(1).

In my motion, I also want the House to consider the terms of reference for the Standing Committee on Private Members' Business itself, found in Standing Order 36(1)(a), which provides no evidence to support the reasons given for rejecting my motion. Standing Order 36(1)(a) states:

In making its selection, the Committee shall not take into account the number of Members jointly seconding an item, but shall allow the merits of the items alone to determine the selection—

I and other Members of the House appeared before that Standing Committee. We gave all of the reasons why we thought our Bills or motions met the terms and conditions of the Standing Order. Not once was I challenged that my Bill did not meet the terms and conditions as outlined in that Standing Order.

That committee which represents us and which is the only committee we have to take our case to Parliament, met *in camera*. Only members of the committee can attend to discuss the reasons why an item should or should not be voted on in