

If the Chair were to review Petition No. 332-1271, the Chair would find it was approved on June 12, 1986, and presented on March 9, 1987. If the Chair were to review Petition No. 332-1276, presented by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) with respect to the Patent Act, the Chair would find it was approved on November 7, 1986, and presented on March 10, 1987.

This practice is continuing. In fact, on Friday, March 20, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) presented three petitions. The petitioners were supposed to be very concerned about the Patent Act changes. Those three petitions were certified by the Clerk of Petitions on November 26, 1986, four months earlier, and then presented last Friday. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that members of the New Democratic Party are bringing the House into disrepute by this abuse of one of the fundamental principles of our democratic system for blatant political purposes.

Citation 666 of *Beauchesne's Fifth Edition*, states:

The right of petitioning the Crown and Parliament for redress of grievances is acknowledged as a fundamental principle of the constitution and has been exercised without interruption since 1867.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that by certifying petitions and holding them for formal presentation in the House on a daily basis, the New Democratic Party seeks to create the impression that there is a continuing ground swell of public opinion with respect to a certain issue which is continuing for a long period of time. I submit this is an abuse of a long-standing parliamentary tradition. This abuse denies Canadians who have petitioned the Crown and Parliament for redress of their grievances speedy access to that redress. It brings Parliament into disrepute. It unfairly creates the impression of a long-standing issue and denies the Government of the day the right to reply promptly either to the petition or to the individuals who signed the petition.

You will know from the former occupation you and I both share, Mr. Speaker, that there is an expression that justice delayed is justice denied. Canadians who petition the Crown and Government have every right to expect that the Crown will receive their petitions quickly if they entrust them to a Member of Parliament and that the Crown will take the petitions into account. If a Member of Parliament has a petition certified and then delays the presentation of that petition for political purposes, that hearing and redress are unfairly delayed.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that Members of Parliament have a responsibility to present petitions as soon as possible after certification. If they cannot do it in person, there is a practice in the rules of procedure whereby the petition can be filed with the Table and have the same force and effect. I suggest that this practice brings Parliament into disrepute. The distortion of the petition process brings this entire Chamber and its Members into disrepute.

I have no difficulty whatsoever with the formal presentation of petitions. That is part of our tradition and should continue. However, Canadians who signed these petitions trust their

Members of Parliament to present them promptly. If they are delayed for political purposes, then I suggest that Canadians are going to view the petition process with great skepticism. I suggest that petitions are a legitimate gauge of public opinion if they are fairly worded and presented promptly. While the delay in the presentation of a petition does not diminish how the signatories feel about the issue, if they are delayed in order to create the impression of a long-standing grievance, then that distorts the situation.

• (1120)

Your Honour will also know that under Standing Order 106(8) the Government is required to reply to a petition within 45 days. Today I tabled some 83 replies of the Government. We have respected that deadline. We have also gone further and in some cases written to individual petitioners.

I have here for examination, if Your Honour cares to review it, a letter which is being sent to all petitioners in the case of the Patent Act by the Hon. Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre), in which he states very fully the Government's case in respect of changes to the Patent Act.

While I would not suggest that the petitions are being tampered with, I would suggest that there are examples of letters in reply which read as follows: "I never corresponded with anybody on this subject and I have no interest in the matter"; "I suspect that somebody has wrongly used my name for political purposes"; "The reason for my mystification is that I have never corresponded with the Prime Minister on this or any other subject"; and "I have never written to you concerning the hassle over generic drugs, nor have I signed any petition". I do not want to pursue that aspect of this point of order any further. I just raise the question.

The second abuse of the petition process is that Members of Parliament from the New Democratic Party are misleading Parliament when they present petitions certified by other members in a deliberate attempt to create the impression that an issue has widespread concern.

On Friday, March 20, the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) distributed petitions to his colleagues in the NDP for presentation in the House. The Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom), the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse), the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo), and the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands (Mr. Manly) participated in this charade. All those petitions—and I have them here—were certified by the Hon. Member for Spadina on Thursday, March 19. On Friday, the Hon. Member came into the House and distributed them to his colleagues for presentation. All the addresses on those petitions were from Metropolitan Toronto and area.

By having these petitions presented by Members from Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the Hon. Member for Spadina sought to have Parliament believe that Canadians in different parts of the country were petitioning Parliament for