

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: Given the seriousness of this question, I wonder if all hon. members could exercise some considerable restraint and allow each other to address the Chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona has raised a matter which I think the House knows is serious. The hon. government House leader has referred to the fact that across the country there is an unprecedented mood, at least in current times, of antagonism toward not just those of us who happen to be elected but to the whole political process. Some of that is manifested by complaints as to what happens in this place.

We have had several incidents recently which I think have given concern to reasonable and decent people in this place, which means the majority of us. The hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona is raising as a point of order whether or not we are adequately dealing with some of the things that have happened. What he is asking the Chair to do is to consider these matters and perhaps find a way to report back to the House so that we can reach the objectives which most of us wish to not only meet, but to maintain. We must also keep in mind our obligation to this institution, the history of the place, our country and the public.

• (1040)

In reply to the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona, the government House leader is rising. He started off by talking about concerns which he has already mentioned in the past about decorum in general in this place.

I certainly think it appropriate, given the circumstances, that I should hear him.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, as you summarized, the question of decorum, the behaviour in this House, has been the subject of much public discussion and much public disgust, frankly, as it sees the manner in which we operate.

Too often, if we do not like the answer, the statement or the debate from the person opposite, we shout, we yell, we try to shout them down and we try to throw them off track. It is almost like we do not want to hear what they have to say.

Yet, the public who is watching expects us to debate in seriousness the major issues that are facing the country. We are not to howl down each other. We are not to use epithets and so on.

There is a question of epithets being particularly harmful and hurtful to the individuals concerned. There is no question about that. Epithets of any sort should not be used in this House. Some do hurt personally to a greater degree than others, and sometimes our mouths get in motion before our brains are in gear. Things might happen.

The hon. member over there is interrupting me again. He will not listen to what I have to say. He has to interrupt. He is a member of the New Democratic Party.

This debate has been going on and on. We have had discussions about it. We keep interrupting each other when we talk about it.

There is the member for Victoria again, interrupting me.

As a result of this reputation and the demeanour which has come into disrepute, I have raised the matter on many, many occasions with House leaders opposite in this House.

We struck a management committee in the last reforms. We have asked it to deal with a lot of aspects of how we perform in here and to come forward with recommendations.

Frankly, this is an opportune time for me to commit now to this House, and I will of course discuss it with opposition House leaders first, that after the break when we come down, I will put a motion before the House which will define clearly what is inappropriate behaviour in this House and empower the Chair to enforce that code of conduct in a direct way.

I will commit now that we will make it a free vote. If it is a government motion, we will make it a free vote. I will commit now to have that motion on the floor of the House, let it be voted on and then the Speaker will have been empowered by this House to deal appropriately with any in this House who feel that epithets, barracking, yelling, interruption or any of those behavioural things which the public finds offensive can be dealt with.

I will make that commitment now since for a year now we have been talking about it. Nothing happened. Perhaps it is time to bring it to a head, and when the break is over a motion will be brought forward to that effect.