

*Privilege—Miss Bégin*

which make the Chair the institution without which this Parliament cannot function.

[*Translation*]

For instance, if I may be permitted to note that Beauchesne thus defines your characteristics:

[*English*]

The chief characteristics attached to the office of Speaker in the House of Commons are authority and impartiality . . . Reflections upon the character or actions of the Speaker may be punished as breaches of privilege. His—

Her; this is an old book.

—actions cannot be criticized incidentally in debate or upon any form of proceeding except by way of a substantive motion.

[*Translation*]

I could go on at length in this vein but I will refrain because it seems to me that the matter is much more serious than a legal question. For several weeks, I would even say for several months, hon. members have certainly noticed that in some corners of the House every opportunity lends itself to making disparaging insinuations against the very office of Speaker of the House. Like many of my colleagues I am not fully conversant with our procedure. I think that most of us do not have legal training, which indeed strikes a healthy balance in the representation of Canadians. Still we cannot operate properly if, through you, Madam Speaker, there is lack of respect for the rules of the House. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition did let slip unfortunate comments in the past. I do not know why. We all have our ups and downs, some weeks or months are more difficult to live through. But we cannot tolerate that the fundamental institutions of the House be held up to ridicule to the extent they were yesterday. As proof, witness the importance given to our debates by the TV media which show on every screen throughout the country the acts of a person whose personality and duties we fully respect.

I might add that it is rather ironic to listen to the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition who seems anxious either to destroy you, Madam Speaker, or destroy the role you are playing among us, or perhaps to create an atmosphere of disorder in the proceedings of the House. I cannot say what motivates him. But it is ironic indeed that such a direct and flagrant attack against the office of the Speaker of the House is made by the Leader of the Opposition during an exchange of questions, allegedly in support of a better status for Canadian women, allegedly in support of Canadian women who have significant achievements to their credit, at the very moment when members on both sides of the House were speaking for others instead of letting women themselves air their views. And then the Leader of the Opposition could not do any better than launching an attack against the first female Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada in a way such as I have never witnessed before in the eight years I have been here, which happens to be the length of her mandate as well.

Since the beginning of the week we have had many questions about the Advisory Council on the Status of Women—

and we will be hearing more about it today since that is the subject chosen by the Progressive Conservative opposition—and I have noted how very easy it is, and unfortunately very sanctimonious on the part of certain people, to appear as champions of the cause of women, in words but not in deeds, supposedly to promote equality and simple justice for women.

I find it particularly deplorable that the Leader of the Opposition did not enrol for more courses in sociology and social psychology. Had he taken a course on institutions, he would have learned that institutions have life, personality, those very institutions of which he always poses as guardian. He has been preaching to us about that ever since he got elected, always posturing as the specialist of great issues. He would have learned that if people who work within an institution lack respect for it, it does not exist. To my mind that is the most serious consequence of the insidious attack which the right hon. gentleman probably let slip during question period yesterday.

The only thing left for me to do, Madam Speaker, is to demonstrate as best I can that such an attack against you was indeed a breach of privilege. For example, Sir T. Erskine May sets it out very clearly, I think, in his nineteenth edition, page 152, and I quote:

[*English*]

As examples of speeches and writings which have been held to constitute breaches of privilege or contempts may be mentioned:

First of all:

Reflections on the character of the Speaker and accusations of partiality in the discharge of his—

Or her.

—duty.

[*Translation*]

And then he gives a whole series of references to cases over the years where this type of attack was the first example given of a breach of privilege of each member of the House.

Having established as best I can, I think, the inadvertence and the unfairness of the comments which the Leader of the Opposition probably let slip, I suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that in all likelihood there was a breach of privilege. I am aware that the Leader of the Opposition is well known for his respect for formalities, we have often heard him speak on that subject.

[*English*]

I therefore ask him to withdraw this unfortunate remark. If he does not, and Your Honour finds a *prima facie* breach of privilege, I propose to move:

That the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition in regard to the impartiality of the Speaker be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!