

Privilege—Mr. Reid

Such is the difference which I wanted to point out between the standing orders of the House of Commons and the standing rules of the Senate. I think that members of this House are democratically elected while Senators are political appointees.

[English]

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester North): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that almost daily, in one way or another, we are talking about matters relating to our procedures prior to the question period. It is getting to the point where much of the time of this House is being taken up with matters relating to the rules of the House. Unless we want to waste all our time in this chamber talking on points of order, points of procedure and questions of privilege, something will have to be done, and done quickly, to remedy the situation. At the same time, I think this House owes the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) a debt of gratitude for having brought before the House one of the really key issues concerning any parliament, one that goes to the heart of this parliament—that is, freedom of speech.

Any time we hear a parliamentary secretary raising a question of privilege, he is speaking on behalf of the government, indicating the government's point of view. In this particular instance he was indicating the government's approach to the rules and to the procedures of this House, and he indicated that when discussions take place before a committee, a very hard line will be taken by the government to gag members, no matter what party they belong to, on whatever issue they wish to speak. They will be prevented from putting forward their points of view on anything that is of value and significance to the Canadian people and to the development of this nation.

One of the points that the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River seems to ignore is that we are members of parliament and that parliament consists of two Houses, not of one. It consists of this House and the one the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) wishes to ignore, degrade or eliminate if possible. Whatever the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre feels about the other place, I want to tell him that he is much better when he rises to his feet to argue, in this tribune of the people, for freedom of speech than when he is trying to gag a member who wants to put his point of view before the Canadian people on matters of interest to the Canadian public.

We in this chamber should do everything in our power to see that the public is kept fully aware of every member's point of view on every piece of legislation, no matter whether he be in this or some other chamber. Further, the government has indicated on more than one occasion in this parliament that it intends to initiate more legislation in the other chamber. Therefore, that chamber should be aware of the particular points of view of its members, especially those with expertise in a certain area.

I do not think I have to go into the merits of the matter since the hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) did that so well. I suggest we should support his remarks.

[Mr. Gauthier (Roberval).]

● (1500)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. There have been many contributions of great value to this interesting point. The hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) was allowed some latitude in talking about support of freedom of speech as opposed to the technical question in respect of which we really are dealing, but I would hesitate to allow other members to debate that subject as well. In spite of the importance of that topic and the fundamental principles it involves, we are really dealing here with a procedural question. There have been some interesting parallels drawn, but the fact of the matter is that there seem to be two questions involved. The first question is whether there is anything in the regulations of this House or its precedents to prevent the action which has been discussed, that is a member appearing before a committee of the other House. The second point is, if that is not so does such an appearance constitute such an affront to this Chamber it ought to be considered a question of privilege, or ought to be prevented in some way. Basically, those are the two questions involved.

If other hon. members want to contribute, I hope they will confine themselves to those questions. Otherwise, I would propose to reserve on the matter and deliver judgment as soon as I can put together all the precedents and regulations that have been cited.

Mr. Hal Herbert (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker, I have just one point to add to my support of the argument advanced by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Apparently he was thinking only of the 124 members of the opposition who might want to run to the Senate committee to present their points of view.

In the case of Bill C-29, which is the subject that gave rise to this particular matter, I have done considerable work, but because of a conflict of committee commitments I was unable to appear before the justice committee. I accepted the decision of this House when that bill was given third reading. I suggest that is the issue; whether we do or do not, as members, accept a majority decision of this House.

When the hon. member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) appeared before the Senate committee, I applied to appear before that same committee to present a contrary argument. The issue before us is not just whether members of the opposition should fly to the Senate to plead their arguments, but whether any of us should go to plead the arguments we were supposed to plead before our own standing committees of this House.

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I will try to follow your stricture about narrowing the focus, and plead guilty to appearing informally before a Senate committee last week. I regret that I did not think it necessary to call the member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) to ascertain whether he would give me permission. The issue before the foreign affairs committee of the Senate last week was that of international relations, in particular having to do with provinces and states, and how they get together under the umbrella of the accords of the national governments of our respective countries.