

Point of Order—Mr. H. Gray

precedent, Mr. Speaker, then we have not the rule of law but the rule of persons. While one does not need to discuss the personality or character of this or that official or Minister, we obviously do not wish to have a situation in which documents are available only on the action of our Minister. They should be available in an impartial way on the action of the Clerk.

I believe, although it may seem strange or unnecessary, it is necessary to rule that the debate we have heard heretofore was an interesting conversation, but it was not the debate as prescribed by law on second reading, particularly because that ruling would have regard for the possibility of the Government introducing measures to limit the debate. The debate has not been full because the document with all the facts was not fully available.

● (1430)

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, when I rose before, I said that I wanted to talk about my privileges as a Member of Parliament simply because there is a Standing Order that states that no Bill may be introduced either in blank or in imperfect shape. That is part of the rules that are given to me by which I as a Member of Parliament operate. The rules guarantee that I have certain rights and privileges on behalf of my constituents. I believe I have a right as a Member of Parliament to say that my rights to represent my constituents are influenced by my ability to depend on the Standing Orders and my knowledge of the rules by which I will operate. It is important for me to know that you will also watch those rules as the Speaker and I know that you have done an excellent job in that respect. No disrespect to you is meant by my point. I am simply bringing up my concern about the debate that took place thus far.

In the debate, I was unable to discuss the text with authority. I would have spoken to Clause 6 of the mutual agreement but, instead, I debated the way in which the agreement was reached rather than the terms of the agreement itself.

The absence of a specific document could be extremely important. If, after the debate had moved along, one were to find that there were changes or differences between what one thought the document was and what it really was, things could become extremely difficult. One would look as if one were quoting from a flawed text.

It seems to me to be an absurd argument to say that we could go to the office of a Minister to get a document. This House is a political place. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, from a political point of view, that I would go to the Government for anything accurate these days? Can it be imagined that I would go to the office of a Minister to beg for his documents and then trust those documents? It is the House of Commons to which I must be able to come to get the official text, and not some office of the Government.

If a precedent is set that it is acceptable to go to an office of a Minister if we want information about our Bills, it would be a very serious departure from anything we have done in the

past. There is the Table, there is the Speaker's office and there is a way for Members of Parliament to come to you without having to become beholden to the Government for anything. We should be able to come to the House of Commons for documentation, and if such documentation is not tabled, and is part of a Bill, then in fact that Bill is not complete.

When I debated the Bill I spoke to the issue of how the mutual understanding was brought about, but I did not speak to the issue of the text. I have here notes on what I might have said later in this debate. But, in any case, the Government chose to try to strangle the debate. My remarks would have dealt with Clause 6 of the agreement, but I do not yet to this minute have from the Table the access to Clause 6 which I need to be able to debate it. That is why I was talking about privilege. I was referring to my privilege as a Member of Parliament to be able to carry out my functions without being beholden to the Government, or finding it necessary in any way to turn to the Government for anything to do with the text of a Bill to be debated in the House of Commons.

Mr. John McDermid (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening with great interest to the debate that has been going on and I would like to make a few points if I may.

The Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) talked about tampering with the rules as if this were being done deliberately. I contend that in fact, we tamper with the rules every day as we did when this Bill was introduced. At the time it was introduced it was not introduced in accordance with the Standing Orders. We tamper with the rules from time to time.

The Hon. Member who just spoke said that he could not discuss the text of the Bill with authority. However, I listened with great interest to the speech he made yesterday and, as found on page 2545 of *Hansard*, he said: "but so are the Canadian people, not only by this agreement," which he had in his hand, "but by other evidence". Then, on page 2546, he said the following:

—Canada caved in and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States that did, indeed, impose a 15 per cent duty—

If he did not have the facts in front of him, how could he have been so emphatic when he said that these things were indeed done?

I agree with my colleagues, including the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski), who have submitted that the public was not prejudiced. The documentation was in the public domain and was available to anyone on December 31. Members were not prejudiced. The documentation was sent to their offices in both official languages on January 5. There have been 20 hours of debate on this matter so far. Every Member of Parliament, without exception, I believe, had a copy of the agreement, and many of them quoted from it rather—if you will pardon the expression—liberally during the 20 hours of debate. I do not believe that either the public or the Members were prejudiced in this particular instance, and I