

Oral Questions

I take nothing away, as I said at the beginning of these brief remarks, on how strongly we may feel about things. As your Speaker of course I am all sweetness and light, and kindness and gentleness, and I am not supposed to have a single thought in my head. Perhaps some of you will remember that there were times when I was sitting there that I may have provoked some anguish on the part of a Speaker myself. Most of us have probably been in that position at one time or another.

The point is that the institution and our country has to take precedence over our own anger or our own convictions when it comes to remarks in this place. I have never said that there had to be some kind of antiseptic, absolute order in a place like this. There never has been and I doubt there ever will be unless we just send zombies here. But there has to be reasonable order. When I say reasonable order I say that because without it there is no free speech and that is the fundamental that this place is all about: the right to speak.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: If we do not abide by the rules that we set for ourselves, that right to speak will be lost.

The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca is well and honourably known to me. When I say well-known that implies many things. I know the hon. member very well. I also know his passion, his convictions and his principles. Along with most decent-minded people in British Columbia, I admire that. I also know that he has had a great deal of parliamentary experience, not just in this place but as premier of my province in the legislature of British Columbia. His contribution to public life has been extensive and no doubt will continue to be.

Now that is as far as I can go in this disputatious place. I think I heard some hon. member say a moment ago: "Just a minute, Mr. Speaker, you are going to get him re-elected". That of course is not my purpose.

My purpose is to ask him upon consideration if he could, in the interests of this place and of our traditions, just very quietly say that he withdraws his offensive words and then perhaps we could end that part of the issue. The issue to which he takes such umbrage continues and there are other places to debate it.

• (1510)

I wonder if the hon. member could assist the Speaker. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, it is true that I have had a great deal of experience, all of it positive. I have had a great many wounds, most of them self-inflicted. But, Mr. Speaker, I am not talking here about a difference in debate; I am talking about a matter of fact. There is a passionate difference in debate between myself and the government on this issue. Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: I have asked the hon. member to make his remarks, and I hope that they will be of assistance to the Chair. I want to hear his words. He may have said something which I may not have heard because of comments in the House. The hon. member.

Mr. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the rare thing in this experience of being in public life is not being told the truth. In the presence of the member for Etobicoke North I was told that that committee would be travelling to Mexico and the United States to further expand questions that we had about the nature of it. Mr. Speaker, I was lied to. That is what I referred to—

Mr. Speaker: Just a minute. It may be that things were said. Whether they were said with the intention to mislead, which is what is necessary in order to amount to a lie, is a matter of opinion. But we cannot use those words here. I am going to ask that the hon. member consider perhaps for a few hours his position, and I hope that he will find it appropriate to withdraw.

The right hon. the Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might, as a statesman on his way out, make a comment that my hon. friend might reflect upon.

The Speaker in his very eloquent comments asked the member to withdraw his remarks. Mr. Speaker, if you spoke like that about me I would be ready to withdraw my resignation.

May I just make a suggestion to my hon. friend. I am not aware of the to and fro but may I just point out, out of respect for someone who has emerged as one of the most remarkable and successful Speakers in modern history, and given the point of view expressed by Mr. Speaker, why does my hon. friend, as a statement of respect for the Speaker and for the House not simply withdraw the remarks and we will get on to other things?