

● (1530)

Mr. Speaker: I will continue to hear Hon. Members, but there is something that I feel I am duty bound to clarify with all Members. I happen to know that one of the witnesses before this particular committee is a member of the riding association of the riding which I represent. I want to assure Hon. Members that I have had no discussions with that citizen. I want Hon. Members to know that the Chair is listening to submissions with very great care. I felt I owed a duty to make it clear to all Hon. Members that one of the persons involved is a member of the riding association in my own constituency. I have had nothing to do with influencing what that person has said or done. In case there is any doubt, I want it to be absolutely clear to the House that that is the case.

I noticed that the Hon. Member for Hamilton East and the Member for Burnaby did not mention that. I take it that that was out of regard for the Chair, and that is a courtesy which the Chair very much appreciated. I feel honourbound to make that clear to all Hon. Members. I do not think that affects the argument, but I would rather have that understood than have suggestions made by anyone at any other time which might impute the integrity of this entire discussion. I thank Hon. Members for hearing me on that point.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I have made my point. I would like to respond to the statement with regard to evidence of tampering. I believe that if the Speaker examines the transcript of the meeting he will discover that there is evidence of tampering with at least two of the résumés, and possibly three, of the appointees before the Human Rights Tribunal. I believe you should take that into consideration in making your decision, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a very brief submission on this issue. In particular, I would like to reply to some of the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary. He indicated that the witnesses were asked to appear in the Prime Minister's Office in order to allow them to understand the process and ask questions about the nature of the appearance they were about to make before the Parliamentary Committee. With the greatest of respect, Mr. Speaker, his arguments are not very persuasive.

It is of paramount importance to ask why the individuals were asked to appear in the Prime Minister's Office to be briefed or coached by officials from the offices of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). Certain conclusions can be drawn from what occurred. Other Hon. Members have drawn those conclusions and I agree with the submissions made by them.

In my view, to condone what happened would set a very dangerous precedent. The integrity of the parliamentary committee process has been threatened by the actions of the Conservative Government in this case. It is not the role of the Prime Minister's Office to invite witnesses to be coached or briefed to help them understand the committee process. If such as responsibility exists, it is that of the nonpartisan clerk of the

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committee. It is inappropriate for the Prime Minister's Office or that of any other Minister of the Crown to invite witnesses who are about to appear before a committee to attend briefings. That would threaten the integrity of the parliamentary committee process. The conclusion which can be drawn quite readily is that the evidence of such witnesses would be tainted and not objective. If such a thing occurred within the criminal justice system, I suggest it would be tantamount to the obstruction of justice.

Mr. Nowlan: Poppycock.

Mr. Nunziata: It is not the role of the Prime Minister's Office to try to convince witnesses to give certain testimony before a parliamentary committee. In my view the Government introduced this reform to enable the Opposition to ask questions in order to satisfy Parliament and Canadians that people were being appointed to various boards and commissions based on merit. That which the Government has done has created considerable cynicism with regard to government appointments. It has also created considerable cynicism about our system.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to rule that there has indeed been a breach of the privileges of this House. In my view, the Government of Canada, through the Prime Minister's office, has shown contempt for this Parliament.

Mr. Reginald Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to speak on this matter both as a member of the House and as Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights. I noted your remarks from the chair, Mr. Speaker. Your reference in no way added to the knowledge which members of the committee had. Every member of the committee was fully aware of the political affiliation of the appointee to whom you referred. We were aware of that because it was contained in a résumé which was circulated to each member of the committee. We all received copies of résumés which outlined the political affiliation of each appointee. While I welcome your statement and understand your reasons for making it, I point out to the House that we were all aware of the affiliations of that and other appointees.

That is representative of the fullness of knowledge available to members of the committee, either through papers circulated among us or through knowledge gained by questions freely asked with very few restrictions during the extended series of hearings. As an example of that, the committee discovered the holding of the information meeting which has occasioned this debate.

There has been no attempt to restrict this committee or any member of it from seeking the knowledge required to carry out the responsibility given to us by Standing Order 104. That is clear from the fact that this private meeting, which has been falsely called a secret meeting—and there is a difference—was fully described to us by the Parliamentary Secretary who was in attendance at our meeting and by each of the witnesses who attended that meeting. There was not the slightest attempt to