

Government Orders

Standing Orders is there a mention of what to do about offending an entire group in our society.

We need to have more than just motions about decorum. Fancy words are not going to solve the problem of sexist and racist attitudes. I ask the Prime Minister to set an example by removing the two offending members from their sensitive and lucrative positions. A parliamentary secretary position is seen by Canadians to be a reward for good service to the government and an inclusion into the government hierarchy. He has failed to answer that letter and has failed to take that kind of action.

The leader of my party has said publicly in this House that she would remove any of our caucus members from their duties if they were to shout sexist or racist comments.

I hope that government members will look carefully at the amendments that have been raised by the Official Opposition and the amendments that have been brought forward by the New Democratic Party. I sincerely urge them to support those amendments. If those amendments become part of this motion then it will have real meaning to the Canadian people. As it is, it is meaningless. It does not address the issue that Canadians are asking us to address in this place. Sure, they say Question Period is theatrical. Sometimes it is pretty theatrical, but a lot that happens here in the House or in committees is very substantive and members do work together co-operatively. I do not want this place to be seen as the laughing stock of Canada or seen as having the lowest level of leadership and behaviour in our society. That is what Canadians are saying right now after these most recent examples of racist and sexist slurs. They think that we are beneath contempt on those kinds of things. We must take this issue seriously. We must deal with it in the short term. In the long term we have to work to change the attitudes that produce sexist and racist behaviour.

• (1340)

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the time. I want to thank the members here for their attention and urge them again to support the amendments to this motion so that it will have real meaning.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the hon. member for New

Westminster—Burnaby. I have listened attentively to her dissertation and know she speaks passionately on the equality issue. I have observed that since she began here time here in 1988. I know she believes very fervently in that. Does she not think that if all of us on both sides of the House were to pay closer attention to the rules already in the rule book House it would lead to a greater sense of decorum in the House of Commons?

It is a two-edged sword. With the adversarial role there are many times when the barbs and heckling go on, most often in good nature. She and I have exchanged good natured heckling with each other over the months. Would she not agree that closer observance of the rules, as we already have them, would go a long way to improving the decorum in the House of Commons?

Ms. Black: Of course I believe in individual responsibility. I believe that we were elected here. We have the endorsement of our constituents. I think they expect us to show a basic level of decorum. I said that in my comments. I do not think any of us should need lessons on that. We come here as adults. We should be able to behave in a respectful way and meet the decorum standards he spoke of.

My point is that racism and sexism are not a matter of decorum. They are attitudes that insult a whole segment of our society. When I was called a fishwife in this place, which is the only time that I have got up to ask another member to withdraw, it was not just an insult to me but an insult and denigration of all women in our society. That is the point that I am trying to make. Decorum is fine. How could anyone be against decorum? We would all like to behave. We all already believe in it.

We must deal with the racist and sexist attitudes that I know the hon. member agrees exist here. We must do something to change that.

Mr. Pat Sobeski (Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the member for New Westminster—Burnaby. At the close of her remarks I thought she said something that was very valuable. She said that many times in the House and many times in committee work a lot of positive things happen.

Of course we have *Hansard*. This is the *Hansard* for October. There are many comments in it. The member unfortunately just highlights two, though she is correct in saying that even two is far too many. It is important that we emphasize the many positive things that happen here,