

Mr. Woolliams: No, no yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The question is therefore on the amendment of Mr. Woolliams, seconded by Mr. Paproski—

Mr. Woolliams: On a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) on a point of order.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, our House leader was called out of the Chamber for a minute. He is now ready to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) on a point of order.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, I was rising on the same point of order as that raised by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I now understand what the hon. member for Calgary North said. I was, perhaps, a little hasty in starting to put the amendment. I saw no one rise and therefore concluded that the House was ready for the question. The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker).

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, in beginning my speech this afternoon there are some observations I would like to make with respect to this bill, and the subject matter of this bill, which has had such a checkered career in this parliament.

In view of what the legislation says with respect to firearms control, I am greatly surprised by the fact the minister devoted so much time, out of the time allotted to him, in the course of his speech to that particular provision in the bill. As the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) said, there was a tremendous parliamentary battle fought over that earlier.

I want to join with the hon. member for Calgary North in supporting the purpose of the amendment which he has put. I think it is a wrong parliamentary practice. I argued the case on a point of order the other night in another matter. We place in the legislation that comes before us so many sections dealing with different aspects that, as the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) said the other evening, one may feel that he or she should vote nay to the entire bill. One may feel that he or she should vote nay because there is a difficulty with a group of sections, and yet be bound to vote yea, or be perceived to vote yea.

It is a blot on our legislative process that we have come to a point where that procedure is acceptable. It has been upheld by the Speaker on the basis of precedent that various aspects of a subject matter, or even unrelated subject matters, or even subject matters with respect to different statutes, can be dealt with in the same bill. The result of all of this is that it makes it difficult for members of parliament to be accountable. By the votes they cast, I believe it tends to prolong parliamentary debate that must follow, because members of parliament feel they must explain themselves with respect to their votes on account of the difficulties of misconstruction—

Criminal Code

Mr. Blais: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the hon. gentleman from Grenville-Carleton with a great deal of interest. He is coming very, very close to casting aspersions on a judgment of the Chair made earlier this afternoon, by referring to a matter that has been dealt with by the Chair and that the Chair has decided upon. The decision of the Chair was made pursuant to precedents set by Hon. Lucien Lamoureux, the predecessor of the present occupant of the chair. I hope that the hon. gentleman is very careful not to impugn the motives, or indeed the judgment, of the Chair in these matters.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. The Chair was quite attentive to the remarks of the hon. member and I think he was relating his remarks to the reason why he was supporting the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams). The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton has the floor.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Postmaster General (Mr. Blais) for his interjection because it demonstrates to the House and to the country that while he was sitting in his seat he was asleep. The hon. gentleman is so quick to interject. Had he been listening he would know that I was not casting any aspersions on the Chair, or on the previous occupant of the chair. What I was saying was that it was unfortunate that the Chair was bound by precedent, a precedent in a matter which makes it difficult, on the one hand, for the public to understand, and on the other hand for parliamentarians to explain their actions in terms of votes and accounting for those votes.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, an observation of that nature is not a reflection on the Chair; it is a reflection on an unfortunate precedent which the Chair must follow in these circumstances. I take second place to no member of the House in regard to the respect which I show the Chair. I have to confess that from time to time I disagree with decisions of the Chair, but I am as aware as anyone of the position the Chair is in under our rules, the fact that there is no appeal from its rulings. This places a great responsibility on the Chair, and because of this my respect for the Chair is increased. I think it does not advance the debate in any way for the Postmaster General to rise in his place and show what is in fact a bona fide disrespect for the Chair by intervening the way he did, by asking the Chair to intervene by raising a spurious point of order.

Perhaps because of our complex legislative process or because we tend in modern society today to intervene to a greater and greater extent in the lives of individuals, this parliament is busier than ever, which means it is necessary for more and more provisions to be packed into fewer and fewer bills. That may be the case, or there may be a thousand explanations. It may be, as the deputy opposition whip said, a matter of some cunning on the part of the government, which I suspect might be the case. But whatever the reason, it is unfortunate that this is deemed to be acceptable parliamentary practice.