

other associations, to go out on the hustings, to go on radio and television, write letters to the editor, make speeches, all of that certainly is part of the right of a member of parliament to try to keep an issue alive, but I suggest that to try to keep it alive by going to the morgue at the other end of this building is to deny the whole proposition that we are part of a democratic society.

An hon. Member: Right on.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We seem to be complaining about an action which has been taken by a member of this House. I do not blame him if he feels inclined to find a way to press his ideas. I just think he chose the wrong way. He is a very capable member and has shown this very clearly, especially since he left the cabinet. I hope he will keep on doing it. But I do not regard his judgment as very sound in deciding that that is the best way to try to advance his cause. We seem to be criticizing the hon. member for Windsor West, but I rise mainly to criticize the other place. I think the members of the Senate have no right, knowing the rules they have in their books—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):—knowing the rules that are in both our books providing for formal relationships between the two Houses, either to invite the hon. member over or to consent to his going over. This short-circuit procedure gets around all the established arrangements. I agree there are not as many rules as one might look for either in their Standing Orders or in ours, or in Beauchesne, but it is clear that the arrangements between the two Houses are on a formal basis. When an individual member of this House or of the other place goes to the other House to try to say that the decision made in his own House is wrong, that is in violation of the way that these two places work. On top of that, my main point is that I do not think it is appropriate for any member of this democratically elected body to go pleading his case before an unelected and unrepresentative body such as the Senate of Canada.

● (1450)

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, the matter of privilege on which you are being asked to rule has in my opinion serious implications for private members of this House and for the future of the committee systems both of the other place and of this House.

I listened with a good deal of interest to the argument of my hon. friend from Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I must say I agree with him that the rules in the two Houses should be parallel with regard to the appearance of a member of one House before a committee or any other emanation of the other House. But there is one matter on which I fundamentally disagree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. His views on the Senate are very well known, but I do not think they should colour the approach to a rational division of labour between the various committees of the Senate and those of this House.

The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) attempted to make a distinction in his remarks. He said

Privilege—Mr. Reid

that he thought it would be in order for members of this place to appear before certain types of committees of the other place. He referred to the committee on the mass media and the committee on poverty, and said that it would not, in his opinion, be proper for members of this place to appear before Senate committees dealing with matters which might come, in the ordinary course of events, before a committee of this place. Such a distinction would be almost impossible to administer, and in my opinion would be meaningless. Certainly the wide-ranging activities of the committee on poverty could well anticipate legislation which would arise in this place.

There is one even more fundamental matter which I hope Your Honour will consider. For example, there is in existence today a committee of the other place looking at cannabis legislation. I understand there are members of the House of Commons who have views on the subject and would like to testify; if I am wrong in this respect, I have been misinformed. In my opinion, it is only fair and proper that an opportunity to give what might be lengthy testimony should be afforded members of parliament if they seek permission in the proper way to appear before the other place, in which case it should be granted.

We are all seeking today to make the committee system work. It is overburdened and encumbered with work. There are conflicts arising over time of meetings, there are difficulties in getting the attendance of members in different places. When a committee structure exists in both the Senate and in this House, and there is a means by which some rational, informal division of labour regarding hearings in the early stage of legislation can take place, then it seems to me prudent that the rules should permit the members of this House to appear before the other place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on this question of privilege, because it has just been stated that the standing orders of the House of Commons are not similar to the Standing rules of the Senate.

It is understandable, Mr. Speaker. If the democratically elected members were not allowed to act freely at the government level, if within a party, as several people have suggested, a dictatorship would prevent a member from acting as the people's representative, democracy would be hindered.

It is not so as far as the Senate is concerned, Mr. Speaker. Restrictions can be laid down in the Senate. It has been pointed out that the consent of the Senate is absolutely necessary to testify before a committee of the House of Commons. Indeed, senators are not elected, but they are political appointees. Thus the Senate can be entrusted with some duties. The politicians can summon the senators, who are not democratically elected but are appointed as a political reward. This can explain the difference between the standing orders of the two Houses.

To prevent a member or a minister from testifying before a Senate committee would merely be an impediment to democratic freedom, because a backbencher is as democratically elected as a minister or the prime minister and he should thus be also entitled to testify before those committees.