

Privilege—Ms. Copps

I want to refer directly to Beauchesne's because there is an allegation here of tampering and breach of privilege by persuasion or solicitation. As I said, this is a new process. People are being asked to come to Ottawa to appear before a standing committee which contains Members who hope to make political gain out of examining them as to their qualifications.

An Hon. Member: That is the only thing they have in mind.

Mr. Robinson: Point of order.

Mr. Mazankowski: Can't stand the heat.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair wants to be more than fair in hearing arguments on all important points in the matter raised by the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) and the Hon. Member for Burnaby. All Hon. Members know it is very difficult for the Chair to adjudicate upon sometimes severely conflicting points of view if motives are questioned. I ask all Hon. Members to refrain from doing that as much as is humanly possible in this very human place. I will continue to hear the Parliamentary Secretary.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, we have dealt with two items. I think it is important to pin down the allegations that witnesses were tampered with, that they were asked to change their testimony, such that they came to the committee with a different view than the day they got off the plane, train or out of the car. I think it is perfectly reasonable to help people understand the procedure. It is new to them. We have no wish on either side to embarrass them over the process. Therefore, certain arrangements were made to facilitate an understanding of that process.

Mr. Robinson: That is the clerk's job.

Mr. Lewis: If that is the clerk's job, name one committee in which it is being done by the clerk.

Mr. Robinson: That is the clerk's job.

Mr. Lewis: Name one committee where it is being done. This is a new procedure.

Mr. Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary is a veteran of the House of Commons. His exhortation to the other side to do one thing or another may or may not be received with dispatch and concurrence, but at least it should be put through the Chair.

Mr. Lewis: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. Having dealt with that item, let us look at what the witnesses are being reviewed on. They get an understanding of the process and the questions to be asked, which are naturally as to competence and ability to fulfil the requirements of the appointment. I would also point out to the other side that we have brought in tougher conflict of interest guidelines. I do not believe, with all due respect, that Clerks of the committees are schooled in those guidelines.

I think it is only fair that these witnesses have some understanding of those guidelines and the questions which may be put concerning them before they appear before a committee. This is done simply to make the witnesses aware of the process.

In all of the allegations we have not heard that any testimony was being interfered with. When you have a résumé before you which states the person's qualifications, the questions asked concern those qualifications and competence for the appointment. Surely that cannot be changed. If you have the qualifications, then you have the qualifications.

Ms. Copps: You changed the résumés.

Mr. Lewis: The Hon. Member is new to this process because it was not in effect in the Province of Ontario and we just brought it in here now. She understands that.

I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I got off the track there. In finding that there has been an abuse of the privilege of members of these committees, whether it is this committee or any other, surely there has to be more proof than we have heard here today that a witness has been tampered with or that there has been, directly or indirectly, any attempt to deter or hinder any person from appearing. Deter or hinder! We set up the process to get them before the committee so how can we be deterring or hindering? We are bringing them in and explaining the process.

This entire question of privilege revolves around whether or not anything untoward was done in trying to explain to a Canadian citizens who have decided to come forward and serve their country as appointees how the process works. Should they not have the right to understand the process whereby they appear before a parliamentary committee? I believe we owe it to any individual coming before a committee to be questioned on their abilities and competence to go over the process with them. It is not to change their résumé, not to suggest we are going to do anything different than ask them questions. We have a duty to tell them the nature of the process and, I submit, that is all that has been done and nothing more.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I realize this is a very serious question and one which you will have to deliberate at some length. I believe as you review the transcripts of the meetings last night you will see that clear evidence was presented from at least two witnesses that the résumés were tampered with. More specifically, they indicated to the committee that they had sent résumés which included their political connections and those résumés had been altered. The witnesses stated that they had not altered the résumés, that the original résumés sent included a reference to membership in the Progressive Conservative Party. I believe that if you review the résumés and the "blues", Mr. Speaker, you will see that there was clear evidence of tampering, if the words of the witnesses are to be believed.