

Privilege—Mr. Knowles

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I will be very brief. Particularly in light of the very interesting remarks and submissions made by the hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), I think Madam Speaker could take judicial notice, in your capacity as Speaker of the House, of the fact that there is unanimity with respect to the position being put forward in support of this particular motion by both opposition parties.

I think it is very interesting to note that the unanimity extends to the NDP which supported the government in moving this matter out of the House quickly to committee and are now expressing very serious concern with respect to the activities of the government vis-à-vis this particular operation of its committee. When we talk about fundamental rights, and rights of individuals and members of Parliament, nothing could be clearer than the position taken by the government House leader. On October 24, 1980—and this was understood—he said that it was up to the committee to decide whether the debate should be televised, and as to the material organization which would be involved that aspect would come under the responsibility of Madam Speaker.

Clearly Madam Speaker's ruling in the letter to the chairman of the Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped is a ruling. It is a ruling on your part. If it is not certain in the mind of the government House leader what is the situation now, and in view of his undertaking that there would be no problems with respect to financing, I think he will find himself in a new situation. If I can be permitted to speculate on what the New Democratic Party will do in this situation, they will lose the support of the NDP for the cozy deal entered into between the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Leader of the New Democratic Party.

It is a serious matter. The government should give very serious consideration to what position it takes if it wants to proceed in an orderly fashion on this particular motion.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1630)

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I want to participate briefly in this debate. I wish to indicate to the member for Saskatoon-West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) that I think he misspoke himself, to be polite, when he suggested that our party supported the quick removal of debate on the constitution from the floor of the House of Commons. Our party opposed closure when it was moved by the Liberal party. We supported the extension of time for the debate. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) has just spoken up and said that we supported the reference to the committee. That is absolutely correct. We have taken a position, which I know the Leader of the Opposition disagrees with, but it happens to be a position which is one of principle.

There are a number of principles contained in the resolution of which we are in favour. There are a number of amendments and improvements which we intend to make in a constructive way. That is the manner in which our party has approached

the debate. That is the manner in which we have approached the question of the constitution. It is the manner in which we intend to continue to try to remove from petty, partisan politics the question of the patriation of the constitution as far as possible and the manner in which it will be patriated. It is because of that commitment, Madam Speaker, that I want it to be made perfectly clear what the position of the New Democratic Party is with respect to the process. As my leader has stated today, it is not simply a question of the proposals themselves, it is a question of the process under which the government works and the way in which it works in presenting this package to the Parliament of Canada and the Canadian people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rae: Closure, in our view, was a mistake. It was a very serious mistake, one which damages the credibility of the government when it says it wants to develop as broad a consensus as possible. In our view the attitude which has been expressed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) with respect to the attitudes and the positions of western Canadians is a very serious mistake.

Finally, the way in which the government has treated this committee and the attitude it has taken with respect to the question of the extension of time—

Mr. Clark: Was your deal a mistake?

Mr. Broadbent: No, our deal was not a mistake.

Mr. Rae: The question of time, the question of the treatment of the committee and the way in which we deal with television have been serious mistakes on their part. The Leader of the Opposition has raised a question. He asks if the treatment with respect to the general package was a mistake. My answer to him is, no, sir.

I have no hesitation in saying, and my leader has no hesitation in saying there is a time to state certain principles and there is a time to take a position as a federal party. The Leader of the Opposition can take a position—I am not entirely clear what it is, but he is entitled to take a position. I do not begrudge him that position. But I think there is a very fundamental point which the government has to recognize. It is that the Prime Minister cannot come before the House of Commons and say it is up to the committee to decide what to do, and then have Your Honour make a decision.

I might add it is not simply a decision out of the blue. As a member of the finance committee last fall, under the chairmanship of the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke), we looked into the question of whether or not it would be possible for us to televise the proceedings of the finance committee when we were discussing the question of interest rates. At that point we were informed by the legal officers of Parliament that it would not be possible for the committee itself to decide to have televised hearings. We were required to obtain the approval of Parliament. When we requested the unanimous approval of Parliament under Standing Order 43,