

Point of Order

Mr. Dingwall: Madam Speaker, we agree with the suggestion of the government House leader, but I wonder if he would perhaps give us an undertaking that the Minister of Labour would forthwith meet with our critic who is available to discuss certain provisions which we allege might be in the bill. We would have to see the bill in its complete form. If he could do that forthwith—and I presume some consultations will take place with members of the New Democratic Party as well—we could get a firm indication from the government and from the House on the way in which they wish to proceed with this particular bill.

One o'clock does not seem to be an inordinate amount of time before a House order could be given, but if necessary we would be prepared to sit through the lunch hour in order to address this matter as expeditiously as possible.

Mr. Danis: Madam Speaker, I will of course meet with the opposition critics. If the hon. opposition House leader will let me do the opening speech in the debate, I will do that immediately after.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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POINT OF ORDER

COMMENTS IN CHAMBER

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on an entirely different subject on a point of order which really ought to be raised today. I want to speak to the matter of how the House deals with the question of language which has been found offensive enough to be withdrawn by hon. members.

I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are very concerned about what happened in the House yesterday. I am not here standing on my feet today to reflect on the way in which you dealt with that or any previous incident, but simply to speak to the matter of how the House in general and how the House's tradition deals with these matters and how we might deal with them in the future.

• (1030)

It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, as you so rightly pointed out yesterday that a tradition exists in this House. When a

member withdraws a particular comment and apologizes, that has traditionally been the end of the matter. I understand that tradition and I think it is a good one.

You can look at the literature with respect to these kind of incidents. For instance, Beauchesne's fifth edition, citation 325 states:

When the Speaker takes notice of any expression as personal and disorderly,—

He then goes on to talk about retracting the offensive expression and apologizing to the House et cetera for the breach of order. The point I want to make here is that this tradition has developed in and around what have been regarded as personal remarks, those which are offensive to the individual person.

We do not really have a tradition of dealing with remarks which are offensive to an entire group of people. The problem has arisen in the last little while of language which is thought to be insulting not just to the particular member. Therefore it has traditionally been satisfactory for the person to get up and withdraw that personal insult. If the member to whom the insult has been made is satisfied, that has been the end of the matter and rightly so I say, as you pointed out yesterday.

The fact is that an entirely new concern is developing now and that is how do we deal with language which is offensive to an entire group of people.

An incident arose a couple of weeks ago in which sexist language was used and was found to be offensive to all the women in the House of Commons and Canada. Language was used in the incident yesterday which is found offensive by an entire group of people in Canada, in this case the black community.

How do we deal with that? It seems to me that that is the question which the House at some point has to address itself to and that is why I raise this point of order. It may be that there are other things that have to be done. The government itself has to be accountable for the behaviour of its members. That is another matter. That is for a political debate between the government and its critics. I am not here to raise that particular point.