

● (1640)

I believe the House should be given an opportunity to decide this important question.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I have been following the debate this afternoon and I regret to be in disaccord with my colleague. According to the practice of this House, someone who was absent for a vote cannot explain how he or she would vote. It is not a rule of this House, but a long established practice of it. This has happened time and again. I well remember that in December, 1979, I was present in the House of Commons for a very crucial vote. However, I had given my word of honour to the then Minister of National Defence that I would pair with him and therefore would not vote on that famous night before the Government was defeated. I was present in the House but I did not vote because I had given my word of honour. I was pushed around by a lot of people in order that I vote. In order that my electors would know that I was not absent from my duties and was present in the House, I believed it was my duty to get up in the House and say that I was paired with the Hon. Minister of National Defence and, therefore, did not vote. I drew to the attention of the Speaker that I was present in the House and if I had had the occasion to vote I would have voted in a particular way.

However, to the best of my knowledge and memory, this custom is reserved for Members who are present in the House, as I was a moment ago, although I decided not to participate in the vote. I believe that this is the proper procedure. I disagree that those who arrive late for other than good reason—

[Translation]

One moment. This is what could happen in the days and weeks to come. All Members who are absent from this chamber could come in and say: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that I was unable to come to the House. I was absent or I was in my office and I was unable to vote. I would like it established that this long honoured practice can continue.

[English]

I would like to continue so that this good and long-standing practice will be accepted in years to come. In the past, many Members of the House have respected gentlemen's agreements by not voting—

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I resent some of the language which is used in this House. I know my hon. colleague is usually very sensitive on such matters and it is not very often that he uses these phrases. Indeed, I think this is the first time I have heard him—

Mr. Speaker: With the greatest of respect, I do not think the Hon. Member has said anything which would cause another Member to rise on a question of privilege.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege.

Introduction of Bills

Mr. Speaker: Is this a new question of privilege?

Ms. Mitchell: The question of privilege is that the Hon. Member was speaking of gentlemen's agreements. There are more than gentlemen in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: There are some who aren't gentlemen.

Mr. Nystrom: There are only two gentlemen left.

Mr. Speaker: As the Hon. Member is entitled to, she has made her point. However, it is not a question of privilege.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, my English vocabulary leaves something to be desired. I would like to say to the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), through you, Mr. Speaker, that it never cost the taxpayers of Canada a penny for me to learn the second language which I am now speaking.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Prud'homme: I learn it through practice.

Mr. Broadbent: Cheap shot.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege.

Mr. Prud'homme: The best way for people to learn a language is to be corrected, as the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) has gently done. If she would like to tell me the term for an agreement which used to be called a gentlemen's agreement, I would be more than happy to use it.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I have a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Hon. Member for Burnaby has moved a motion. He argues that the motion that an Hon. Member be recognized in the place of the Hon. Member who has been recognized ought to be accepted by the Chair and that there should be a division, if necessary, in the House. The Chair has considered this practice very carefully. It originated because there were cases in which some Members felt that a particular Member who was recognized ought not to be heard or because a particular Member was not getting a fair chance to rise in his or her place and enter into the debate. These practices go back many years and the time frame in which these rules were made is of great interest to many Members and all historians.

Mr. Broadbent: Would you elaborate on that?

Mr. Speaker: In the case this afternoon there has been no suggestion that Hon. Members rising to explain how they would have voted had they been in the Chamber were being precluded from doing so. In fact, it was quite clear that the Chair was recognizing, and properly so, those who wished to