

Privilege—Ms. Copps

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Hon. Member for Hamilton-East (Ms. Copps) will know that it is against parliamentary decorum to impute motives to any Hon. Members. I know the Hon. Member would not want to do that.

The Hon. Member is giving an explanation of a situation that has arisen in committee. I think it would be advisable if Hon. Members paid attention to these matters because, as a consequence of reform, committees are being asked to do things and use initiatives that they have not had before.

It is the Chair's disposition to continue listening to the Hon. Member. It may not be a question of privilege, but there certainly seems to be a point that the Hon. Member wishes to bring to the attention of the Chair. I would ask Hon. Members to hear the Member thoroughly.

Ms. Copps: I certainly did not intend to impute any motive. I am seeking your guidance because, as I see our responsibilities under the Standing Orders, specifically to be in a position to review all or part of Order in Council appointments as recommended under Standing Order 104, I do not see how we can fulfill those responsibilities when we are being limited as to the number of persons who can be brought before the committee in a kind of lottery system.

I seek your guidance as to whether or not the intent of Standing Order 104 is being subverted because of an arbitrary decision of the committee.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same question of privilege. I was in attendance at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Rights yesterday. It had been agreed by the steering committee of that committee that some 16 appointees to Human Rights Tribunals would in fact be heard by the committee and examined with respect to their qualifications under the Standing Order in question.

Yesterday, over the opposition of both members of the Opposition who were present, it was decided that that list would be eliminated and, instead, each member of the committee would only be entitled to put forward one name. That means that each opposition Member could put forward one name and Government Members could each put forward one name. That is an attempt to muzzle the committee effectively in its important role of monitoring the appointments to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunals.

I, as a member of the committee, raised serious questions with respect to the qualifications of a number of members who were suggested for appointment. The actions of the majority effectively deny me as a member of that committee and, more importantly, a Member of this Parliament, from giving any kind of effect to the Standing Order that provides for overview and scrutiny.

The final point is that the process of scrutiny in this particular instance is of particular significance because a broad coalition of organizations, including the Canadian Jewish Congress, the National Action Committee on the

Status of Women, the Canadian Human Rights Advocate, and many others, raised serious concerns with respect to the qualifications of the individuals who were appointed to this very important position of a member of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

What we saw yesterday in the Standing Committee on Human Rights was an attempt to deny Members of Parliament our right to question these appointees with respect to their qualifications. Surely that kind of muzzle constitutes a breach of the privileges of Members of the House, as well as a breach of the Orders of the House. I would ask Your Honour to take the necessary steps to ensure that the full intent of this very important and new Standing Order is in fact respected.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, I attended that committee meeting as well. I can confirm the description of what occurred. I agree with the description given by the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson).

● (1510)

I want to make the point that this is a new section of the rules. I know it is very rare that the Chair will enter into procedures and decisions made by chairmen of committees. However, I want to ask you, Mr. Speaker, to bear in mind that this is a new section of the rules and a new power being given to committees. The practice followed last night effectively eliminates this rule, which is a rule of the House of Commons.

The Chair, I submit with respect, has a duty to ensure that these rules are applied and that committees do not follow procedures which prevent members of the committee, in their duties as members, from seeing that the rules are available and that the review of newly appointed individuals pursuant to Orders in Council does occur.

In effect, of the 16 members who were selected by the committee, nine will not be able to be reviewed because of the interpretation imposed over the objections of the Opposition by the majority of government Members at the committee last night. It is not a matter about which the Chair ought to say, with respect, this is a matter for the committee to settle. A real abuse took place last night.

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, first I would submit there is absolutely no breach of an Hon. Member's privilege here. It is my understanding that the subcommittee made one decision and the full committee, all members of the committee, made another decision. What the Hon. Member is complaining about really is that she did not win at the full committee. I am sorry, but that happens around this place and the majority rules.

It is a very good principle that each member of a committee be asked to pick one member who he or she thinks should come forward under the appointments process. Something which has not been brought out, and I am sure you will be aware of it, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a committee of chairpeople who