

French-English dictionary and an English dictionary, to check the meaning. In the English dictionary, the word "tamper" is defined as follows:

To alter, corrupt, pervert—

And that was never, not in any way, either directly or indirectly or otherwise, the case.

Yesterday, I told the Hon. Member for Hamilton East that I could not accept the allegations she was making. Considering the personalities of the two Members, and I have come to realize in the two years I have been here—

[English]

Ms. Copps: That's imputing motives.

Mr. Mazankowski: He is speaking on a point of privilege.

Ms. Copps: He's impugning the integrity. He cannot comment on someone's character.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would like to say to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) that we are in the midst of a point of privilege. I will hear the Hon. Member at the appropriate time. Will the Hon. Member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead (Mr. Gérin) please continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérin: Mr. Speaker, I have come to realize in the past two years that they often get carried away. This time I am willing to forgive and forget, but I have to say this will be the last time.

In fact, once they had been advised the meeting had taken place, the two Members had an opportunity to ask the witnesses who were present at the meeting all the relevant questions, and no one cast any doubts on the good faith or the actual testimony of these people.

So what I find particularly distressing is that today, after having had this opportunity to ask these questions, they say there has been a case of tampering, as they say in English. There was no tampering.

It is extremely distressing, because in addition to attacking me, Mr. Speaker, they are also attacking people who have been appointed to the Human Rights Tribunal, distinguished Canadians with extremely high professional qualifications. In fact, I was surprised to see how qualified some of these people are.

And today, they are being accused of having submitted to "tampering". That we cannot accept, Mr. Speaker.

In concluding, I would like to say that if the two Members want to pursue the issue, let them make a clear and specific charge, and in that case, there are other rules in the House that may apply. However, they will then have to suffer the consequences of having made unfounded charges.

Privilege—Ms. Copps

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Lethbridge—Foothills): Mr. Speaker, with respect, we who have been around the House for some time—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps I could interrupt the Hon. Member; I know he will graciously agree. I think the Chair has heard the issue fully. If it would please the House, the Chair would prefer the Hon. Member for Lethbridge—Foothills (Mr. Thacker) to be the last speaker on the issue.

Mr. Thacker: Mr. Speaker, we know from history how serious is a breach of privilege question. If someone tries to block any Hon. Member from getting into the House to perform his or her duty or to give a speech, that is a true question of privilege, perhaps the only one.

A question of privilege has been raised over some conduct on a committee. There has been no allegation that the rights of Members to question have been interfered with or that any questions were prohibited. There is no doubt that that would be a question of privilege, but not the events of today.

The Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) has not been in the House since making his speech. I will tell the House where he has been—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must ask all Hon. Members to respect the custom of the House—and it is an ancient and honourable tradition—that we do not comment in the House on whether or not a Member is in his or her place. All Hon. Members know that there are pressing duties on Members of Parliament. People are often visiting them, and Hon. Members must go to other places. I hope all Hon. Members would agree with the Chair that we should be very careful not to comment upon the absence of any Member from the Chamber. The absence of a Member one day is coupled with the absence of another Hon. Member another day. Given the press of obligations and duties which all Hon. Members owe to their constituents and to the country, continual attendance in the Chamber is sometimes very difficult. I know the Hon. Member would agree that the better course is not to make reference to the absence of a Member. I know the Hon. Member would want to support the Chair in that regard.

Mr. Thacker: Mr. Speaker, I remind you of the judicial principle in a court of equity, the court you are operating in today—when one comes into a court of equity, one must have clean hands.

What about the rights of the witnesses? It will be a frosty Friday before I will agree to the extension of these rules. Thousands of citizens across the land give hundreds and hundreds of hours each year out of their lives to make Canada the civilized country it is. We put in place a temporary process so that they could be quizzed on their qualifications. They have fundamental rights. They have the fundamental right to privacy. Another right is to belong to a political Party.