

I urge Your Honour to recognize that indeed we do have Standing Orders here which have been undermined and thwarted by the conduct of the Government and by the conduct of the Prime Minister's office.

One final point. I have mentioned that we are dealing here with quasi-judicial appointments. Your Honour can imagine the uproar if the Prime Minister's office were to brief people being appointed to judicial positions. We are not just dealing with any quasi-judicial appointment here, we are dealing with a situation in which these appointees have come under significant attack because it has been suggested that they were, in some cases, appointed on the basis of their political credentials. There have been questions about the doctoring of resumes. There have been concerns expressed about the nature of the review process itself. Taken in that context, as well as a situation in which questions were already raised about the partisan political involvement in this important human rights oversight process, to allow this kind of blatant political manipulation by the Prime Minister's office to proceed is a clear breach of the privileges of the Members of this House. Certainly I too am prepared to move the necessary motion should Your Honour find that a prima facie case has been established.

Mr. Speaker: Before calling on other Members, perhaps the Chair could direct a question to the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson). I think it is important that the Chair understand exactly what the point is that the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) and the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) are making.

There has been reference—I think just now by the Member from Burnaby—to the fact that one or more of these suggested appointments may have political affiliation. The Chair would like to know clearly whether the position which the Hon. Member is taking is that any person who is a member of a political Party is automatically barred from being considered by a Government for these appointments. I think it very important that that point be clarified now. If the answer to that is in the negative, then the Chair will be able to deal with the matter more easily. Could the Hon. Member for Burnaby please clarify?

Mr. Robinson: If there was one issue upon which all members of the Standing Committee on Human Rights were unanimous, it was that the mere fact of political affiliation, if it is coupled with other qualifications such as recognized competence in the field of human rights, clearly does not disqualify an individual for appointment to the Human Rights Tribunal.

That was not the concern, but rather that the appointments made in a number of cases were made solely on the basis of political qualification; in other words, solely on the basis of Progressive Conservative political affiliation and in the absence of any other qualifications whatever. No one, I believe, would suggest that political affiliation in and of itself

would disqualify any individual otherwise qualified from serving on this or other government tribunals.

● (1520)

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Chair can help. I take it that the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) is making it quite clear that the political affiliation of someone named to this particular Commission is not in itself the issue.

Mr. Robinson: No.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is important that that be clarified before the discussion goes any further. The Chair would remind all Hon. Members that many Canadians belong to political parties, and not all to one political party. No doubt in the thousands of appointments made by any Government to judicial or quasi-judicial bodies it would be healthy for democracy to have a fair and even mix. However, the Chair takes the representation of the Hon. Member for Burnaby as not precluding someone from consideration because that person happens to be a member of a political party. I thank the Hon. Member for his contribution.

Are there other Hon. Members rising?

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few remarks on this alleged tampering with committee witnesses. It is odd to see that coalition complaining about a process of review of appointments which is new to the Canadian political scene. It was instituted by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and our Government in response to concern that the appointments—the process which was so abused by the Liberal Party—should be reviewed by a parliamentary committee. This is the first time it has been done in Canada. The Liberal-NDP coalition Government in the Province of Ontario has refused to institute any such process.

Some Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Lewis: Now we have the Liberal-NDP coalition here arguing that the way we are doing it does not quite suit their convenience.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: There is always on both sides of the House a temptation to broaden the debate on a question of privilege. The Chair senses that perhaps the debate is about to be broadened, so I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to stay on the point which, I remind all Hon. Members, has been narrowed somewhat by the questions asked by the Chair and the answers given by the Hon. Member for Burnaby.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I was about to finish my remarks at that point anyway because I did not want to embarrass them any further.