

Mr. Nowlan: We increased the allowance.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): As my hon. friend from Annapolis says, the matter of these constituency offices was before the members' services committee yesterday. Therefore, the House is seized of it in the committee structure of the House of Commons. I think that is very important.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) at one time in the course of an argument said something which is applicable here. He said:

If any attempt is made to change the rules of this House and to do it in a manner which destroys that equality and gives the government not only the force of its majority, but the force of the rules—

The government is being given the force of the rules, since rules established a constituency office. The rights given by those rules are being affected in the sense that they are being diminished by the establishment of those offices. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre went on to say:

—we have gone completely contrary to the basic principle of parliamentary procedure on which this House relies.

Every custom, every tradition and every precedent that we have quoted here before speaks to fairness, equality and even-handedness. When the House has attempted to make that member equal in his work as a Member of Parliament, whether he is a minister, a former minister, a parliamentary secretary or a private member, then I suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that the customs, traditions and rules—small “r” or large “R”—are being affected by this action of the government.

I put that to you, Madam Speaker, because I felt I had to give you something to rely on from the point of view of traditions and precedents of Parliament. I think they are important. We raised this matter the other day, we have raised it today, and we may raise it later on in the debate from the point of view of the protection of those traditions and precedents. The argument I tried to make the other night applies in so many ways.

You, Madam Speaker, have the unique position of being the first Commoner to be the protector of those rights, freedoms and traditions and to take the Standing Orders and interpret them. I say that, with respect, having regard to the traditions of fairness and equality and the precedents and history of this place. Some people may say this institution is archaic, and maybe in a way it is, but those things grew up over time. They were fought for and argued about. They were gained, in an historical sense, against the wishes of people in other days who themselves thought that only the majority counted, that only power counted. This House of Commons is something else. It is not—

Madam Speaker: I believe the hon. member is debating the question as though I had decided there was a *prima facie* case. The debate on that question should take place once I have decided whether there is a case of privilege or not. I would like the hon. member to restrict himself to the area in which he thinks the privilege lies.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I conclude, Madam Speaker, by referring to the history of it all, since it relates to the very

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issue which you are deciding. Under the rules, customs and traditions of this Parliament, the point you must decide is whether it is appropriate and fair. You cannot decide on any other basis. If custom, tradition and precedent mean anything at all, then I say, with respect, that you cannot decide on any other basis. If there is any doubt, then the doubt must be resolved in favour of Parliament, in favour of the parliamentarian, not in favour of the government. The job of this Parliament is not to be the handmaiden of the government; the job of this Parliament is to make the government accountable.

I respectfully suggest that there are usages creeping into our practice which make me think that the reverse may be true. We must look to you, Madam Speaker. On the question of fairness under the rules broadly interpreted, as I have indicated I think they should be—and I say this with respect—there is a point of privilege here. It is time this matter was examined. It is particularly important that it be examined, because of the issues being raised with respect to the ability of Members of Parliament to represent the people who sent them here.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: I think I can now cut off the debate on this particular question. I have heard several interveners on this matter. I will reserve on this matter since the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) is not in the House. I think he should be allowed to reply, if he so desires—and I do not know whether he does. But I must give him a chance to reply.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker, with respect to why I think this question is relevant and comes within your domain. I speak as a member of the members' services committee which yesterday approved the recommendation of the Commissioners of Internal Economy. We have approved the fourth and fifth report of that committee increasing the allowances to constituency offices by \$1,000. We increased it by \$1,000 from \$2,500. Anyway, Madam Speaker, you know what I am talking about and I do not have the minute before me. I listened to the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen). I was not going to participate in the debate but I thought the remarks of the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae)—

• (1610)

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Does the hon. member have a point of order?

Mr. Nowlan: My point of order is that this matter has a very insidious aspect. I am not talking about power. I am not repeating the argument of the hon. member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm). I am talking about the power of the purse.

Some hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Nowlan: The order is the whole reason that this chamber was established. Something no one has mentioned yet is the power of the purse. If you marry these two things, the fundamental power of the purse is why we are here to begin with, not legislation or government—