

Privilege

I note you have not as yet received a report from our committee. Further, concerning witnesses citation section 109 states:

Witnesses before committees share the same privilege of freedom of speech as Members.

On more than one occasion in this House the Speaker has risen to challenge the words, the insults and the accusations thrown by one member of Parliament against another and has immediately demanded a retraction.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest you will find that is exactly what I did because in the concluding comments of the witness who appeared before us that member cast an aspersion on all members of this House. I immediately raised a point of order asking the member to withdraw. He refused on more than one occasion as has been clearly indicated by the chairman. I think the steps we took were most appropriate. We defended the privileges of all members of this House.

• (1520)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Does the hon. member for Kamloops have something else to add to the arguments?

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): I would not be standing up if I did not, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that if I felt that all the points had been made adequately I would not have asked for recognition, Mr. Speaker.

I have listened carefully to the words of my hon. friend. I believe that the emphasis of this discussion so far has eliminated or ignored perhaps the most crucial part. That is that the majority of the members of the committee decided they would remove the record of what had been discussed including not only the alleged offensive comments but the entire presentation itself.

We get into extremely dangerous territory when a government majority on a committee or perhaps even in the House of Commons if we want to extend this, on a simple motion can decide that the record of that committee or the record of the House of Commons can be eliminated and what was said will no longer be stated on the record.

Mr. Speaker, this surely has to be one of the critical aspects that you must now consider before you make your judgment. That is because once it was decided, if

your judgment were to go this way, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of the committee could simply eliminate for all intents and purposes all of the transcript of remarks from that committee, where would that lead us in the future? In other words, whenever there were critical comments being made of course the majority of them would have a clear indication of what option may be available to them.

I just simply wanted to emphasize that there are two aspects to this. One is that yes, we can expel witnesses, but whether or not we can eliminate the record is another question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I think the Chair has had enough testimony from all members. I particularly want to thank the hon. member for Timmins—Chapleau, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, the hon. member for Red Deer and the hon. member for Ontario.

I will take this under advisement and will come back with a ruling on it.

Mr. Samson: I just want to correct the record, Mr. Speaker.

The member for Red Deer indicated that I encouraged the withdrawal of the comment that was made by the witnesses. Just for the record I want to clarify that I was not asking them to because I felt that in the theme of freedom of speech they had the right to express themselves and if we cannot take the heat—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): We will take that into consideration also.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I was prepared to let this go because the arguments have been made. However, as I understand the facts, some outrageous, slanderous and libellous comments were made and they were withdrawn and withdrawal was asked for. If any member in this House refused to withdraw those remarks they would be turfed out as has happened before.

I find it offensive that the hon. member should defend such actions by some witnesses before—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I said I will be taking this under advisement.