

Conduct of Chairman of Defence Committee question; because it is quite evident that by its actions, including those of the chairman, today and for the past few days the defence committee has been endeavouring to curtail debate—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Starr: We have been endeavouring to bring forward witnesses who have expressed their desire to appear before the committee in order to give the committee the fullest detail. The attempt to block them is exactly opposite to what the Prime Minister said before the committee was set up. He said that every opportunity would be given to every witness who had anything to add or any information to give. It is surprising that the Prime Minister now gets up and takes the side of the chairman of that committee and of the members of the Liberal party in trying to curtail the defence committee's discussions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Jack McIntosh (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, not being a lawyer I am not going to get into a debate on the legality of this point, but I suggest that both the Prime Minister and you, sir, have a greater responsibility than the legality of the point we are discussing. What has happened this morning is just a means whereby the committee system may be made useless.

The principle of democracy, whereby a minority group can be and should be heard, applies foremost in this house, and I am surprised that the Prime Minister should get up and say that he is going to abide by and support the ruling of the committee chairman. If the Prime Minister does not believe in the principle of democracy—

Mr. Pearson: I believe in the rules.

Mr. McIntosh: —then all I can say—

Hon. Paul Martin (Secretary of State for External Affairs): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest that we allow the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek to complete his remarks and then I will recognize the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): No, Mr. Speaker. I was rising on a point of order—

Mr. McIntosh: Mr. Speaker—

[Mr. Starr.]

Mr. Starr: Well, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know the minister is anxious to bring the rules and precedents to my attention, but I think it would be much more conducive to reaching a decision on this matter if we proceeded in an orderly fashion. If I were given an opportunity to hear the hon. member for Swift Current-Maple Creek then I would be glad to recognize the Secretary of State for External Affairs, if he would be patient just one moment.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

Mr. McIntosh: I still say—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The minister insists on his right to rise on a point of order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I would certainly be most anxious to comply with your request but in view of the statement by the Acting Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Starr), and the argument now being made, I wish to point out that the only issue before Your Honour at the present time is whether this house can discuss this matter at this time, and that was the only point made by the Prime Minister. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Starr: Why not leave it up to the Speaker?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): —that you now have the responsibility of deciding whether the rule as stated by the Prime Minister is the one which covers the situation—

Mr. Starr: Don't try to force the Speaker to make up his mind—

Mr. Martin (Essex East): —and if it does there is no use making abusive remarks to the Prime Minister, who is simply, by reason of his office as leader of the house called upon to point out what are the rules.

Mr. McIntosh: Mr. Speaker, I was not proposing to engage in an argument. I was only putting forward a point of view. Whether or not it is the rules that are concerned, the principle of democracy applies and I think this is the place where minority groups in Canada can have a voice. The question is whether that principle continues down into the committees, and I am very surprised that the Prime Minister will not get up and