

Privilege—Ms. McDonald

● (1510)

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Speaker, there are two particular points I wish to make. When a government Bill is before a legislative committee, there are normally five members of the committee who are committed to passing the Bill, five government Members who have voted for the Bill at second reading. There may be two members opposed but there are not more than two. There may be no members opposed, depending upon the nature of the Bill.

My private Member's Bill, however, is before a committee which has two members in favour of the Bill and in fact five members opposed to it. It is the exact reverse of the way a government Bill is treated.

A procedure under Private Members' Business that is intended to make it possible for private Members' Bills to be passed, as my Bill was passed at second reading, has been obstructed by the nature of the appointments to the committee. I submit that committee appointments should reflect the same principle for private Members' Bills as they reflect for government Bills. There ought to be a preponderance of members favourable to the Bill on the committee. The chairman ought to be someone who is favourable to the Bill and someone committed to being fair to all Members. That has not been the case.

Finally, I would like to refer to a very particular instance of obstruction which occurred yesterday, an instance which certainly interfered with my ability to handle the concerns of other Hon. Members with the passing of this Bill, a Bill which has been approved by the House.

Yesterday I had proposed that the witnesses who were before the committee be sworn. I had given the chairman advance notice of this so that he could be prepared for it. The chairman passed this information along to his deputy chairman and the meeting was ready to begin. The chairman was waiting for one Conservative member to arrive. Two opposition members and the Conservative chairman were already present.

The chairman of the committee who has publicly opposed my Bill then left the chair, went out to the hallway to greet the incoming Conservative member and told him not to enter the room until there was a sufficient Conservative majority to defeat my motion. That is the utmost of bias. It is unfair—

Mr. Shields: How did you know that?

Ms. McDonald: The Hon. Member was heard by other people in the room telling the Conservative member not to enter the committee room. The meeting was late. It was held up until there was a Conservative majority. My motion would have passed if that member had been allowed to enter and the meeting had started on time. The witnesses were ready.

I submit that that is a very gross interference with normal procedure. It is unfair and my basic principle is that parliamentary reform is designed to give private Members a chance. When a Bill is passed on a free vote with no obstruction in

debate, what good is that if the Bill is then obstructed by the Government using its majority to gang up members of a committee against the Bill? It is quite wrong.

Government Bills go before committees with a preponderance of Members who are in favour of the Bill. Once a private Member's Bill has gone through second reading, the same principle should apply. If it does not apply, then the parliamentary reform designed to make it possible for private Members to have serious business considered will simply be a farce.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Hon. Member with interest. While she may very well have a grievance and may be somewhat unhappy about the proceedings and the result, I would submit to you that I doubt very much whether or not she has a question of privilege.

As well, the point should be made that in the exercise of dealing with her grievance, she has in fact imputed a number of motives, either directly or indirectly, to a number of Members, if she has not made outright allegations against the chairman of that committee, the Hon. Member for Sarnia—Lambton (Mr. James), and against the vice-chairman, as well as indirectly against the Whip of our Party who is responsible for allocating membership to that committee.

The Hon. Member contends that the issue of private Members' Bills is handled in a somewhat different fashion than government Bills and that there has been obstruction. I think we all recognize that this is a private Members' matter and there are no government Whips present. There is no exercise of Party discipline. It is not an issue on which Party discipline is imposed. I think the record is fairly clear on that, considering the votes that have taken place in this Chamber on matters that have been brought forward by private Members from both sides of the House.

I take it that the Hon. Member is suggesting that the committee membership should be selected on the basis of the position the members take with regard to a particular issue. I think that would be a gross injustice. The Hon. Member may have a grievance and may take issue with the position that was taken by the members of that committee, but surely if we start selecting members of a committee on the basis of their predetermined positions on a given issue, that would be the greatest farce we could ever perpetuate upon the democratic process.

What we have here is as well a reflection upon a vote that was taken in a committee. I think we all recognize the rules in that regard. I know that it is improper for anyone to reflect upon a vote that has been taken in the House of Commons, and essentially the same rules apply in committee as apply in the House of Commons.

I do not argue with the grievance the Hon. Member has put forward about which she feels very strongly, but I think that in the enthusiasm and vigour with which she has presented her