

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 20, 1961

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. PITMAN—ALLEGED ABUSE OF POWER BY
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. Walter Pitman (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which affects every member in this house. My question of privilege is this. The Minister of Agriculture has grossly violated the rights of parliament and assumed powers beyond those authorized for him by substituting the powers of his department for the legislative powers of this parliament.

If I may direct your attention to the order paper for today you will see item No. 4, which reads "Second reading of Bill C-77, an act to provide for the rehabilitation of agricultural lands and the development of rural areas in Canada." Yesterday there came to my office not one, not two but 50 copies of a pamphlet which announces the agricultural rehabilitation and development act. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is no agricultural rehabilitation and development act on the statute books of this nation. This pamphlet was produced by the information division of the Department of Agriculture, and some of us will remember some of the pungent comments that were made by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate on that particular branch when the estimates of the Department of Agriculture were being considered.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is a flagrant abuse of the powers of this department. I suggest to you that this pamphlet states how A.R.D.A. will operate. How can the people of Canada be told how A.R.D.A. will operate when this bill has not received second reading? Is there a suggestion that second reading has no effect? Is it the contention that a debate in this house amounts to nothing more than the rubber-stamping of a measure?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has perhaps said enough to indicate the nature of his question of privilege. If he wishes to follow the matter with a motion I shall be glad to determine whether or not there is a prima facie breach of privilege.

Mr. Pitman: I wish to be fair to the Minister of Agriculture. There is nothing in this pamphlet which indicates that the bill has been passed.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pitman: I will not, therefore, move a motion of censure or of any kind whatever.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member has gone as far as he should go in his alleged question of privilege.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Minister of Agriculture): In view of the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Peterborough I think it should be explained to the house that in the debate on the resolution I made it very clear that I should like the opportunity to put this bill before not only the agriculture ministers and resources ministers of the provinces, but also the various farm organizations. I should like to inform the hon. member that across Canada at this very moment farm organizations are meeting and using this pamphlet as a guide to their discussions, so that when they meet their leaders they will have a sound basis on which to suggest amendments to the act—

Mr. Argue: There is no act.

Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle):—or the bill to be passed. With that explanation I think the country will understand that in order to have organizations discuss a bill before it becomes law, you must have something tangible to put in front of them. I frankly intend to put out a series of pamphlets on how this act will affect various segments of the agricultural population. I hope they too will study it as part of the agricultural program to help farmers help themselves.

Hon. L. B. Pearson (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister's statement has nothing whatever to do, of course, with the question of privilege. The question dealt with the circulation of a pamphlet dealing with an act of parliament before that act was passed. Therefore, undoubtedly, that action on the part of the minister is treating parliament with contempt.

Mr. Speaker: I think perhaps it would be unfair to debate the matter unless there is a finding that there is a prima facie question of privilege and a motion. I was interested