

PRIVILEGE

UNANIMOUS REQUEST BY STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege arises out of a motion passed by the Standing Committee on Environment and Forestry on January 22 of this year. Evidence was given more than a year ago by the Nishga Tribal Council. There was an interdepartmental subcommittee struck involving a number of Ministers in the House and their deputies. A number of recommendations came from that.

On January 22 of this year the Nishga Tribal Council appeared again as requested as witnesses before the Standing Committee on Environment and Forestry. As a result of the evidence the committee unanimously passed the following motion:

On motion of Jim Fulton, it was agreed—That the Standing Committee on Environment and Forestry have established a committee at the Deputy Minister level to report no later than June 15, 1987 with the specific objective of obtaining funds for the Nisga'a people to purchase, develop and operate a tree farm license tenure in the Nass Valley; and that letters be sent from this Committee to the Minister of State for Forestry and the Ministers of Indian Affairs, Fisheries and Oceans, Regional Industrial Expansion, the Environment and Employment and Immigration to direct their Deputies to achieve these objectives.

On motion of John MacDougall, it was agreed—That in relation to this Deputy Ministerial Committee's investigation, Bob Brisco and Jim Fulton be offered the opportunity to accompany officials to the Nass Valley.

I finally got the letters that I required from the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Friday, which was June 26, some 11 days after the committee had directed that the interdepartmental committee report back to the committee. But June 15 came and went without a report from such a committee.

The Hon. Benoît Bouchard wrote to the committee and said:

I would be most happy to appoint Mr. Gaetan Lussier to set up a departmental sub-committee.

• (1510)

The Hon. Tom Siddon, on May 29, 1987, wrote:

I am of the opinion that my Department should not participate in the review.

The Hon. Michel Côté wrote, and again I will quote—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think it would be more appropriate were the Hon. Member to refer to the Ministers by their Ministry.

Mr. Fulton: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Côté) wrote:

Regarding your Standing Committee's proposal to set up a new sub-committee, I would be happy to assign representatives from my Department.

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. McMillan) wrote, on June 18:

[*Translation*]

"As you know, the former Interdepartmental Sub-Committee was presided by a representative from the Ministry of Forestry and Mines. These last few months, officials from this department have taken part in the discussions between the

Privilege—Mr. Fulton

Tribal Council and the Department of Forests of British Columbia. It seems that progress has been made in meeting the claims of the Council.

I have asked the Environment Canada officials responsible for this matter to monitor the situation closely and to be available for sitting on the new committee if it is established."

[*English*]

The Minister of Forestry (Mr. Merrithew) wrote:

I would like to suggest to the Standing Committee that, given these developments, it would be premature to reconvene the inter-departmental group.

And I attach the full letter.

The Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. McKnight) never even bothered to write back to the committee, after five months.

When a standing committee takes a vote, Mr. Speaker—which, in this case, was unanimous, with all Parties represented—on a motion, surely there is some parliamentary value to it.

In this case, not a single Minister, not a single Deputy Minister in five months, bothered to convene the requested interdepartmental committee. In the case of the Minister of Indian Affairs, he contemptuously refused to even respond to the committee.

In this situation, I feel that my ability to carry on my duties as a Member of Parliament have been thwarted, and my constituents in this case have been treated, at best, undemocratically.

This matter surely should be directed to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, where Ministers and bureaucrats can be held to task for such a blatant abuse of MPs of all Parties.

The final point, Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise is that the Nishga Tribal Council waited for one full year for the first interdepartmental deputy minister task force report. That report was incomplete. The committee then unanimously passed a vote requesting the restructuring of this subcommittee. During this period of time, the Nishga Tribal Council travelled to Montreal, where they met with Mr. George Pettie, the Chief Executive Officer of the Repap. As well, they have had meetings in Victoria, with the provincial Minister of Forests, and a whole variety of meetings related to financing the acquisition of the Nass Valley portion of Tree Farm Licence No. 1.

To be slapped in the face in this way, by five Ministries and by the Deputy Ministers involved, clearly constitutes a question of privilege. It is the kind of matter that should be referred to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, so that we can hear from the Ministers or the Deputy Ministers, who do not even reply to the correspondence and the unanimous vote of the standing committee. I think it constitutes a very serious threat to the reforms of this House