

the majority that was imposed on the committee yesterday. That is wrong.

I say to the government, if it wants to operate under those circumstances, we can play the game also. But up to now I thought we were playing up front. We are playing square, we are playing honest games, and the government and its members are not playing good games at this time.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I do want to put a few comments on the record, because I think it is important that we lay the facts before you on this particular issue.

What I am told happened in this particular case is that the chairman of the committee at the last minute received a letter from the witness in question, Mr. Landers, which stated that he had a problem appearing on October 24, which was to be the next regularly scheduled meeting of the committee. He said he could not appear on that date because he was going to be out of the country, and requested another date.

The chairman brought that letter to the attention of the committee and asked that someone put a motion changing the date. A member of that committee, a member from the government side, put such a motion. He did not deny the right of Mr. Landers to come to the committee hearings. He did not say that he should not be a witness. In fact, the information I have is that they asked for a change in date, that Mr. Landers be allowed to come on October 30.

Anybody with any ounce of common sense understands that from time to time busy people have scheduling problems. When those people have scheduling problems we, as reasonable members of the House, and members of committees, have always tried to accommodate them. We have always tried to bend over backwards to make that a possibility.

So here we are faced with a situation where a witness in good faith sends a notice to the chairman saying he cannot make it on such and such a date, is it possible for a change. The committee decides to accommodate. What happened then is that the Liberals members of the committee decided that they did not want that motion put. In other words, they are going to insist that Mr.

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Landers come back from the States, interrupt whatever work he has to do, and appear on a date that is obviously inconvenient for him. I am told that what was done, in fact, was to try to accommodate the witness and to bring him in on October 30. That is part of the political side that I think has to be demonstrated here this morning, Mr. Speaker, because obviously that is not what is being expressed to you.

The other thing that I think is important is that this is clearly not an example of the government members trying to frustrate the work of the committee. That is not our intention at all. Our intention is to accommodate a witness, not to frustrate the committee. The committee has itself decided that it wants to look into certain aspects of Canada Post and Canada Post services, and that was agreed to by the government members. It is not their intention to frustrate that investigation in any way. So I think it is important that that be noted.

I noticed that my hon. friend, the whip on the opposition side said—and he used his words very carefully—“in some committees, in some cases there is consensus”. Rightly so. We have asked on this side that wherever possible there not be motions that would be used to in any way surprise the committee, or disrupt the committee, or sidetrack the committee. But what we have here is a case of selective application of that principle.

I am told that there was an incident in the transport committee yesterday where in fact there was a surprise motion put that ended up with a bit of a donnybrook in the committee. Even though the committee had already agreed to a number of things, a surprise motion was put by a member of the opposition. So one has to be very careful, when one makes these arguments, that those arguments are on an equal footing and one is treating one side just as fairly as the other.

• (1030)

The other thing which deals more with the actual Standing Orders is that a member from the NDP has said that the order paper notice puts restrictions on the government. Mr. Speaker, you know full well that it does say, as my friend has pointed out, that it is a notice and that things may change, and obviously that is the case with which we have all worked.