

Privilege

as a government are trying to reach through the negotiations, the discussions and the rule changes.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): On the same point of order, the government deputy Whip claims that he does not understand why we are raising this issue today. The reason we are raising the issue today is that we sent a letter to the Prime Minister last week in his capacity as the Leader of the Conservative Party and asked him to specifically direct the Whip of the government side of the House to give a vehicle for the estimates of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to be heard. In fact, we were very explicit in our letter to the Prime Minister that if we did not receive a response by today, this matter would be raised in the House.

We want to raise it in the House because the clock is ticking.

[*Translation*]

We have about ten days left to consider the Estimates concerning the Spicer Commission. Since the government and the Prime Minister refuse to act responsibly, it is up to members of Parliament to do so and to consider in detail all expenditures already made and delegated to the Spicer Commission. We advised the Prime Minister last week that if he could not act responsibly as Leader of the Conservative Party, we were prepared to raise the question in the House. We gave the government and the Prime Minister enough time to respond. However, no response was forthcoming. And that is why today, we are trying to get the Chair to rule on a matter that affects the rights and privileges of all members.

If a process is in place according to which we have the right to examine the expenditures of all departments, including commissions, and that process is denied us as a result of the government's refusal to convene a meeting, that is a breach of our privileges, Mr. Speaker. That is why we submitted that the Prime Minister could have dealt with the situation last week. Since he refused to do so, we are taking our responsibility as parliamentarians seriously and we ask the Chair to ensure that this meeting is convened as soon as possible.

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, on the same question of privilege raised by my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier. The matter of negotiation referred to by the government member is a pretext. There was no real negotiation. It is nothing but a pretext. I too

wrote letters and asked the Prime Minister to intervene. I asked the whip and the other members on the government side to intervene. They did not.

I want to make it clear that I can understand the Liberals and the others wanting to have a good look at the books of the Spicer Commission. I agree with that. But there are other problems, including some that directly affect consumers throughout Canada, others related to gas prices and car warranties, in short all sorts of considerations that members opposite may not deem unduly urgent. We have to respond to letters from constituents and tell them that for six months now the government has refused to convene the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations. The average Joe on the street has precious little use for such legal shenanigans and the various points raised by my government colleague. He wants answers to his questions, recalling full well that the government did brag about enhancing the role of members by giving them more latitude with respect to committee work.

Mr. Speaker, pretending the committee system works has to be the most misleading statement I ever heard. The system simply does not work, and the reference to negotiations is a red herring. Our party whip confirmed that right here and, from what I heard, the Liberals did not get to first base either.

Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the House will have to get involved in this debate, for I have strong reservations about the good will of the government.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary West.

I would like to know why a resignation back in September has not been filled yet. All members of this House believed once that in the reform committee this kind of thing would be a matter of the past. I want to know exactly why there has not been a replacement of the chairman.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, we are on very dangerous ground.

Mr. Speaker: Just a minute. We may be on very dangerous ground and there may be very good reasons why the government does not want to go ahead and do anything because the opposition has not approved, or is