

Privilege

The hon. member is arguing with some skill that certain rules which apply in this place ought to, under these circumstances, also apply in committee. Have I understood the argument correctly?

Mr. Boudria: Generally, yes.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is nodding.

I will come to the hon. member for Vanier in just a moment, but first I will hear the hon. member for Churchill.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, on the same point, Standing Order 116 of the House reads:

In a standing, special or legislative committee, the Standing Orders shall apply so far as may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the election of a Speaker, seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

In other words, Standing Order 116 implies very directly that the committees are bound by the same rules as the House. In the House we have an order paper which lists the government legislation, as it does on page 11 of today's order paper. The government has the right within the legislation listed to bring any one item up for debate. It can switch, it has that right, but it has to be on the order paper.

The paper that was sent out announcing the committee yesterday was an order paper. It is listed as an order paper. It specified that the business of that committee for that day was not what the Conservative committee members in fact did. It was not an item that was before the committee for that day.

I thought, as we set up our standing committees and as we have talked about parliamentary reform and the importance of the committees having their own mandate and being able to exercise certain independence from the government, that we would have got away from those quick moves and the travelling goon squad of Tory members switching the legislation before committees.

Mr. Cooper: Order, that is a reflection on members.

Mr. Simmons: That is an accurate description.

Mr. Murphy: At an earlier meeting the committee decided that it wanted the head of Canada Post to appear. The committee made that decision with Conservative members there. To have a new group of Conservatives come to a meeting which is called for other purposes and say that they do not want the head of Canada Post to appear before a standing committee of this House is outrageous.

The committee has a right and an obligation to investigate Canada Post. It is an order of that committee. The House has been very favourably disposed to the committee investigating Canada Post and is authorizing travel for that committee for that purpose.

I do not understand why a group of new Conservatives would come to a committee and deny that committee the right to hear from the president of Canada Post, why they would try to do so when the orders of the day for that committee specifically said that the committee was supposed to be doing something else.

I find that the only way we can protect members of the House of Commons from this type of outrageous action happening time after time after time is to make sure that we do send out a notice saying what the purpose of a committee is, why that committee is meeting and that without unanimous consent there is no way the majority of the committee can change the rules midstream. If it does that, we are going to have complete anarchy in all our committees, and that is not acceptable to the House and that is not acceptable to members.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a couple of points.

I do not want to repeat the good points that were put, except to say that we all know that the order paper of the day for the House of Commons has a reserve on it that says: "subject to change without notice". However we are not talking about that. We are talking about orders of the day for committees, not several items but one item agreed upon unanimously by that committee which was, at the last moment, changed by the government members.

I want to make one comment, and a plea to government members. They are the ones that came to me on October 1, 2, and 3 and said, "We do not want any surprises in committee, we will play the game straight and forward". We agreed, among House leaders, that there would be no games played and nobody would be surprised. I put out a press release to my members, as I understood every member of the House was supposed to be advised by the House leaders and by the whips to the effect that meetings of committees were to be held for the sole purpose of hearing witnesses—and I remind government members that it was at their request that we did this—or for business pertaining to the hearing of witnesses, and that no other business be undertaken at the said meetings. Most committees have accepted that as a way of operating in good faith, and not the tyranny of