

Agriculture Committee

member of any committee set up by the house to ask that the committee be constituted and set up properly. Of course, once it is, the chairman has certain functions that are traditional. I have no doubt it has been the custom, as a convenience for these committees to be set up at the suggestion of the chief government whip. I daresay that has happened. I have not had too much to do with this sort of thing but I daresay that may have happened over the years. I am sure no official of the house meant to do any wrong or to show any contempt for the house, and I do not think the hon. member suggested that for a minute.

I do feel that perhaps now the matter has been aired there would be a consensus along the line the hon. member has suggested, that any member of a committee set up by this house could have the committee called together if there had been any delay in that respect. I hope that will be the universal view in the house.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): May I say that there is a notice being prepared in my office this morning calling for a meeting of this committee at nine o'clock on Monday morning. I have canvassed a number of the members and believe a quorum will be in attendance in the railway committee room. I think we all owe the hon. member for Medicine Hat a great deal for the work he has done in connection with this matter, and I believe it will change the operations of committees in the future.

Mr. E. Nasserden (Rosthern): I had intended to raise this matter today, Mr. Speaker, because I believe a wrong impression was left yesterday by the remarks made by the Secretary of State. It may be that any member can call a committee together, but until this house has given the committee some order of reference the committee has not anything to do except elect a chairman. I think that is the point this house should take into consideration. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Agriculture if he would submit to the committee on agriculture and colonization the stabilization act for study, and you will recall the answer I received on that occasion. Until this house gives the committee on agriculture and colonization something to deal with, it would be futile to hold a meeting.

Mr. Speaker: There is no doubt about the importance of the question to all hon. members in the house, but we have had an extended discussion and I am inclined to think that while the matter is very important, nevertheless it hardly rates the designation of a question of privilege. I suggest to the

hon. member for Medicine Hat that perhaps on orders of the day he might direct a question along this line to the government.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Is Your Honour telling us now that a member of a committee cannot insist upon that committee being called together, and that instead we have to ask the government questions when the government itself, through the house leader, has specifically stated this is not the function of the government but the function of the house? We are asking that this house function properly so that the committees can be called together.

Mr. Speaker: The distinction I was trying to make is that in my humble opinion the matter is more in the nature of a grievance or a question of procedure rather than a question of privilege. This is the only point I was trying to make. The house, I know, is always master of its own decision in respect of procedure. I do think, in view of the extended discussion we have had, that the air has been cleared, and I am just suggesting the matter might be left there in view of the explanation of the Secretary of State this morning.

Mr. Douglas: May I just say to Your Honour that in our opinion this is most definitely a matter of privilege as it affects the rights of members to have committees called. So far as we are concerned, the question has not been cleared up until this committee is called and properly constituted. If it is not called and constituted fairly soon, we will take further measures to bring the matter before the house.

Mr. Olson: In my view, sir, the question of privilege involves more than just whether or not a member of a committee is permitted to call a meeting. The fact is that I formally requested an officer of the house to send notices or do all the things that are necessary to call the meeting together, and to notify the members of the committee that a meeting should be called, and he says he has not authority to call this meeting and is waiting for the government whip to do it. The point is whether this officer of the house acted properly in refusing to send out the notices after I asked him to do so.

Mr. Speaker: In view of the importance which all hon. members attach to this matter, and which I do too, I am sure they will not object if I take the matter under consideration and take time to study the long memorandum submitted by the hon. member for Medicine Hat, reach a decision on it, and report to the house in due course.