

Privilege

Mr. Speaker: I was trying to make it very clear that there are conflicting opinions. It is not for the Chair to delve into them under the present circumstances. The hon. Minister of Justice rises, I suppose, on a point of order, but the ruling is made and that concludes the matter.

We have a question of privilege from the hon. member for Ottawa West.

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PRIVILEGE**STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege relating to the proceedings of the Standing Committee on the Environment this morning.

I had a motion properly before the committee, of which I had given due and proper notice, having first notified the chair and all members of the committee some time ago that I intended to move the motion. Having given notice of the motion three weeks ago, I properly moved the motion this morning.

Before the motion could be voted on, one of the three government members indicated his intention to leave, specifically to break quorum and to prevent the motion being put. He urged his colleagues to leave with him, which they did.

The committee is desperately short of time to address the large number of urgent problems confronting the environment. The action at committee this morning further cut into that time by cutting the meeting short and preventing the committee from dealing with any other issue, until the government members of the committee choose to return, presumably with a large enough majority to beat my motion and carry on with the rest of the very lengthy agenda of the committee.

Canadians wish to have the House of Commons address these issues. To disrupt the proceedings in this way and squander the time of the committee is deplorable. This is the kind of negative partisanship that undermines the collegial atmosphere which the committee has developed over many months in light of the urgency and the universality of the problems with which we are dealing.

This morning's action by government members has prevented me, and through me, my constituents from being represented in debate on these important issues, both at committee and ultimately in this House, given that the motion requested the committee to take certain actions and report to Parliament on certain matters.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr. Speaker: I think the Chair and other hon. members know with what concern the hon. member brings these environmental matters to the committee. The hon. member has commented upon the collegial attitude that has existed for a long time in the committee and one would hope, of course, that that would continue.

The difficulty that the Chair is in again is a difficulty which I have referred to a number of times. The committee is there and the committee is the master of its own work, unless something happens in that committee which is so extraordinary that the Chair has to view it as a breach of privilege or a contempt. It may well be that a day or two from now the committee will re-engage in harmonious discussion, the Chair does not know. While the hon. member certainly has a grievance which she has expressed, I cannot find any means by which it would be appropriate for the Chair to interfere in the committee's deliberations.

I would hope that hon. members could come to some kind of working agreement and get on with a job that we all wish they would do.

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, may I ask for clarification?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa West is asking for clarification?

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, my concern is that committees are in a very real way an extension of this House.

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to in any way keep the hon. member from raising a matter of importance, but I listened to the hon. member give a full and complete presentation. Perhaps I erred in letting it go on as long as I did, but it is not something that I can interfere with.

I think the hon. member will have to take her arguments across the floor of the House in debate, Question Period or privately, but I do not think we can continue this here. We are getting into debate as to what is or is not going on in the committee. I think that before