

Wheat—Negotiations with Poland

Mr. Speaker: I want to listen to the Leader of the Opposition but I would ask him to give me a chance to conclude what I have to say. What I was saying was that I understand the feelings of the Leader of the Opposition with respect to a situation which apparently developed, and of which he gave us notice last evening when he rose to a question of privilege to indicate that, whereas earlier in the day we were under the impression that the negotiations were not terminated, on the other hand an item appeared in the press that day to indicate that there was a transaction terminated. At that moment the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) did make a statement to the effect that the situation would remain unchanged until his estimates are called for study.

Now, I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition that I will listen to him. I am not usurping the floor. I just want to point out to him for his consideration that I doubt very much whether his point is one which should be raised at this time on a question of privilege. I think it is a matter rather for debate. Having said that, I will hear further representations from him.

Mr. Drew: So that there will be no misunderstanding, what I am saying is neither with any thought of questioning your ruling of yesterday in any way nor of reflecting upon Your Honour's decision; may I say that Your Honour made a ruling based upon two points. Your Honour did not say that one point was merely a minor interjection. Your Honour, in fact, devoted some time to that because Your Honour said, as appears at 5682 of *Hansard* for July 5, 1955:

I take that to be so from the debate and from the determination that has been shown by several members to debate the matter and also to insist that the debate not be postponed from day to day but that it be proceeded with with dispatch. Therefore, having this debate in mind as the first order of the day and having in mind also that we will eventually go into supply to study the estimates of the Department of Trade and Commerce, I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to agree with me that an opportunity will be found soon to discuss this important matter and that then he will probably find a more suitable occasion because the negotiations are still pending; it may be that the deal will fall through, in which case what is the use of having a debate today?

Now, that was the point Your Honour made. Those are Your Honour's words. It was in relation to that, and while this subject was still under discussion, that the Minister of Trade and Commerce, as reported at page 5638 of the same volume of *Hansard*, said:

Perhaps I could relieve the situation by saying that the position will be unchanged when my estimates of the Department of Trade and Commerce are discussed.

[Mr. Drew.]

That statement was made after Your Honour's statement. It was made in the light of the Prime Minister's statement that the negotiations were still under way, and was open to only one interpretation; that was that the negotiations were still under way and would be under way when the departmental estimates were called.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I raised this question at 5.30 yesterday after I had been handed a press dispatch which disclosed that the deal had actually been completed, as announced by Mr. Swartz of the company carrying out the transaction, I had assumed that the Minister of Defence Production or Trade and Commerce, in whichever capacity he sought to act, would inform us about the facts. Instead of that he said that the negotiations were completed that morning. I ask the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) if it is not correct that this transaction was completed a week ago on Wednesday by an exchange of notes between the two governments. I ask the Prime Minister how that ties in with the explanation given on Friday that these negotiations were still under way, and how it fits in with his acceptance yesterday of a statement made by Your Honour that this transaction had not yet been completed and we would have a later opportunity to debate it.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, this is a very appropriate question of privilege at this time. When I raised the matter yesterday at 5.30, I had been handed a dispatch. I did not have before me a copy of *Hansard*, nor could I check the exact words or the sequence of the statements made. The statement made by the Minister of Defence Production was open to only one interpretation in the light of what had been said before and that was that these negotiations could be discussed when his estimates came up and that they had not yet been completed. Any other meaning would be senseless, in relation to what had already been said. I submit that there is a very real question of privilege and that Your Honour should take this into consideration, because we should not be called upon to get the facts from departments of government through the press of the country. The newspapers perform a great service but, great though that service may be, our system of responsible government suggests that we should get accurate information from the ministers themselves. And I place that matter before Your Honour for consideration and for appropriate action.

Mr. M. J. Coldwell (Rose town-Biggars): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am rising on a question of privilege. I must say that yesterday morning, when the statement was made by the