

Question of Privilege

other specified authority, the hon. member's request was sent to the chief government whip to call an organization meeting and to ask the house to refer to the committee the matters mentioned in his letter.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat said at the beginning of his remarks in the house that he had addressed a letter to the chief of the committees and private legislation branch, and he quoted from his letter as follows:

Dear Sir:

I wish to request that a meeting of the standing committee on agriculture and colonization be called with all convenient speed for the purpose of selecting a chairman and other officers.

I further request that the committee be asked to consider and investigate the wide difference between the price received for feed grain by the producers in western Canada and the price paid by livestock feeders in eastern Canada.

Later on the hon. member for Medicine Hat declared that—

—a member of the staff of this house wrongfully interfered with the rights of a member.

Also that—

—the officers of this house are under obligation to call such a meeting.

To this I have already given a preliminary answer, but I might add first that Mr. Anthony Plouffe is not an officer of the house. If one looks at the last pages of *Hansard* of October 23, that is, last Wednesday, page 10, it will be noted that officers of the house are the Clerk of the house, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the parliamentary counsel, the assistant clerks and the deputy sergeant-at-arms. Under the heading of chiefs of principal branches is the name of Mr. Plouffe as chief of committees and private legislation. This does not make him an officer of the house.

Second, the member for Medicine Hat requests from the chief clerk committees branch—

—that the committee be asked to consider and investigate the wide difference between the price received from feed grain by the producers in western Canada and the price paid by livestock feeders in eastern Canada.

This request, that the committee be asked by the chief clerk of committees to consider that particular proposition, is certainly not one which could be entertained by him even if he did have the right to call a meeting of the committee. As stated by Beauchesne at citation 304(1) page 244,

A committee can only consider those matters which have been committed to it by the house.

Neither the chief clerk of committees nor the clerk of a committee should interfere and ask a committee "to consider and investigate the matter referred to". There is no doubt that to do so would be most improper.

[Mr. Speaker.]

If only for this reason, the chief clerk of committees was justified in not calling a meeting of the committee, nor can it be said that he has "wrongfully interfered with the rights of a member"; for the second paragraph of the hon. member's letter cannot be dissociated from the first one.

Third, the responsibility of calling organization meetings does not and should not rest with the chief of the committees and private legislation branch. The main responsibility of the branch consists, once the organization meetings have been called, in seeing that the committees are provided with quarters for the meetings, and to provide also for secretarial and other assistance to the committees. If any and all members could request the calling of committee meetings at any time, it is possible that three or four members might request meetings of the same committee at different times, or at the time of meetings of other committees, and the result would be utter confusion and disorganization.

The government leader in the house, who followed the hon. member for Medicine Hat and who was careful to state that he had not made any study of the question, declared that he had "no doubt it has been the custom that these committees be set up at the suggestion of the government whip as a convenience", but he added other comments which are not in accord with the conclusions of this memorandum.

Perhaps we can leave it at that, with the further suggestion that as the procedure is not clearly defined in our standing orders, this might be a matter that could very well be studied in the committee on procedure.

MR. WEBB—POSTMASTERSHIP AT ENTERPRISE, ONT.

Mr. R. A. Webb (Hastings-Frontenac): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. On October 23 the Postmaster General referred to the postmastership at Enterprise, Ontario, and stated that the widow of the deceased postmaster, Clare Stewart, was not a veteran as I had previously stated.

Mrs. Stewart is a war veteran. Her service number is W23627. She has five children to care for. One of these children has to be maintained at the home for retarded children in Smiths Falls, Ontario. Her husband applied for an army pension shortly before he died but this had not been processed. Mr. and Mrs. Stewart, on being appointed postmaster in April, 1962, purchased a home formerly owned by a doctor in Enterprise. This home was purchased due to the fact that there were no steps leading into the home, thus making it more convenient for elderly people.