

Committee Sitting Hours

Mr. Horner: I contend that the words, "general consent" in citation 303 (3) of Beauchesne's Fourth Edition means, in essence, unanimous consent, and that the words, "the Chairman is frequently allowed to arrange the day and hour of sitting", means that the day and hours of sitting should be prearranged by a steering committee. In the present case this was not done and was not even attempted to be done.

May I refer to one other section of the Standing Orders which provides that it is the duty of the Speaker of the House and the chairman of a committee at all times to keep proper decorum within the House and within the committee.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Horner: Early this morning, unknown to me or to other members of the committee, food was sent in and at four o'clock food was consumed while the committee proceedings were going on.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, this may be all right for the type of sitting that went on last night but I am sure it has never been allowed in the House and I do not believe it should be allowed in committees.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Horner: I suggest that the whole question of the adjournment of committee sittings and the disgraceful and unprecedented proceedings that took place last night should be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for examination.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member gave the Chair notice of his intention to raise a question of privilege. The House has heard the hon. member for Crowfoot and the Chair has listened attentively to the submissions he has made.

As hon. members know, it has not been the practice to allow a general debate on the matter until such time as a ruling has been made on whether there is a prima facie case. The exception, of course, is when an hon. member is personally involved and his conduct is questioned by a proposed motion submitted to the House by an hon. member who raises a question of privilege.

I have some doubts whether the Minister of Agriculture is in any way involved in this matter. It is my understanding that he is not a member of that committee. At the same time, the Chair is not aware who sits on committees from day to day because there are frequent changes. I am simply assuming that the minister is not a member. Perhaps the minister might speak briefly and indicate how he is involved in the question of privilege, because there really should not be a debate until the matter has been intensively and seriously considered by the Chair.

[Mr. Horner.]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might apologize for one comment I made.

An hon. Member: You didn't say anything at all.

Mr. Horner: I will be very brief. I referred to the chairman of the committee. The chairman recommended to the committee that we adjourn some time between ten thirty and eleven o'clock; he then left the committee and it was taken over by the vice-chairman. I may have implied that the Chairman had ruled authoritatively. I must say that the Chairman was very considerate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of Agriculture): At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I would like to reply to Your Honour's inquiry as to how this question of privilege may affect me. In his opening comments the hon. member for Crowfoot suggested that the question of privilege he was raising affected all members of the House. If that is so, then whether I am a member of the committee or not seems to me to be irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister should find a better reason.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I suggest that it would not be conducive to a proper proceeding of the House if every member of the House considered himself to be involved and wanted to participate in the debate on this question of privilege. I do not think that is a sufficient reason. I certainly do not want to be negative in this regard. If the minister can quickly and briefly indicate what his personal involvement is in the question of privilege, he may proceed.

Some hon. Members: Tell us.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the reason I have just given, I am sure Your Honour will agree that, on a matter affecting a bill that I have sponsored in the House and its progress through the Standing Committee on Agriculture, before which I have been called as a witness, it is obvious why I should have a great and deep interest in the proceedings of that committee. I do not wish to particularly argue that point, Mr. Speaker. I want to assist Your Honour, as briefly as I can, in considering the alleged prima facie case of privilege that has been placed before you.

• (2:20 p.m.)

Some opinions have been expressed in the course of raising the question of privilege which are not facts. I am not suggesting that opinions and facts are necessarily synonymous. For example, the hon. member has said that under Standing Order 88 it is your responsibility, Mr. Speaker, to notify the staff and other officials concerned, and he questioned whether or not this had been done. I do not know whether you or your officers informed the staff who were serving that committee, but I do say that that question has no relevance whatever.