

*Privilege*

—or is about to refer matters to the committee.

• (1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, the decision to convene that meeting must be taken by the Whip when the House has made the decision to defer the estimates to a committee or the appropriate committees. That has not been done.

The decision now is not in the hands of the clerk, an impartial person, but in the hands of the Whip, a partisan who has, in my view, responsibilities to his caucus and who acts in an intelligent manner. I am not saying he has done this in trying to hold up the work of the House, I am just saying it is far from being an impartial decision when the government Whip is responsible for convening a committee because our standing orders, which were reformed, which were revamped some years ago, were not able to cope with the situation where a chairperson has resigned.

The Whip, of course, is carrying out the orders of the House leader or the Prime Minister by refusing to convene the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations to permit the election of a chairperson.

I know the arguments he is going to give me about the 49th report of the striking committee not having been tabled. I know all those arguments. All I am saying is that we have a serious flaw in our Standing Orders. This will create an unparliamentary situation, a question of privilege for all members because we are impeded in our work here as members of Parliament in our obligations to the people of Canada, our electors, to look and to scrutinize the expenditures of the government.

It is my contention that the Spicer Commission, whose spending of public money has been much maligned recently, should be given a chance to present its case in public, before a committee, to re-establish possibly its credibility. If this House does not proceed now with having that person or the chairman of that commission before the committee of the House before the time has expired on March 21, we would be playing a hoax on Canadians. We would be playing a hoax on ourselves.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Op-

erations is the appropriate forum for this to go on. Unless action is taken in the next nine days—well, 10 days maybe—before March 21 when the parliamentary estimates are deemed to have been reported back to the House, no public scrutiny by Parliament will have been made of the commission's budget.

The future of the country in my view, is much too important to allow some people to score fast political points at its expense. I am not aiming this at anybody in this House. I am just saying it is untenable at this time to have a royal commission which is looking at the future of our country, not being able to defend itself in front of the public in Canada, in front of this House, as to how it spends public money.

There is a serious flaw in the rules which allow the government to frustrate and deny appropriate and democratic parliamentary processes such as scrutiny of expenditures of public funds. You, Sir, cannot remain indifferent. You cannot remain neutral. There are two avenues you could use. You could say that in view of the flaw in our Standing Orders this whole matter could be deferred to the committee. It has been charged with looking at our Standing Orders. It could look at the Standing Orders and possibly come in with a quick recommendation. That would take time, Mr. Speaker.

The other alternative, which I prefer, is to use your good offices to tell the clerk of the committee that in view of the fact that we do not have a procedure at hand that is acceptable to modern parliamentary procedures, that he, the clerk, will convene a meeting of the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations today, for a meeting to be held tomorrow, to give the commission a chance to defend itself before the House of Commons.

**Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Mr. Speaker, I want an opportunity to present a couple of arguments in this particular discussion. In fact, I want to make three points, but I want to begin by saying this.

I am shocked that the hon. member rises in his place in this House today to make this point because, either one of two things have happened; the Liberal Party has chosen to circumvent the legitimate negotiation process that has been going on between House leaders of this House or, there is a complete lack of discussion among