

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 21, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. GLEAVE—POSTPONEMENT OF DEBATE ON AGRICULTURAL STABILIZATION BILL IN LIGHT OF MEETING SOUGHT BY PRAIRIE PROVINCE GOVERNMENTS

Mr. A. P. Gleave (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege of which I have given notice. My question of privilege arises out of news reports last night and this morning that representatives of the three prairie governments will seek a meeting with the federal government in respect of Bill C-244. In view of this, surely it is unfair to the House to ask members to proceed with Bill C-244 until after such meetings have been held. I therefore address my question of privilege to the government House leader in the hope that he will schedule some other legislation for today.

Mr. Speaker: My understanding is that questions of privilege are normally addressed to the House generally and to the Chair. This one comes before us in a novel way. I am sure the hon. member will agree with me that this is not a question of privilege in the traditional terms; it is rather a submission which he is making at this time to the government by way of a question of privilege. I do not think I should rule further on the matter.

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GRAIN

WITHHOLDING BY GOVERNMENT OF PAYMENTS UNDER TEMPORARY WHEAT RESERVES ACT—SUGGESTED CONSIDERATION OF MOTION TO ESTABLISH IMPEACHMENT COMMITTEE

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask Your Honour to consider arguments as to why there should be put before the House a motion for the establishment of an impeachment committee. This motion is couched generally in the terms of motion No. 48 which appeared on the order paper for Monday, September 20. There are some changes in it so I shall read it as it is only a few lines. My right or the right of any member to put such a motion forms the subject of my point of order. The proposed motion reads as follows:

That a special committee of five members having the power of a standing committee under Standing Order 65(8) be appointed to examine and inquire into the continuing refusal by government ministers to bring about the payment as required under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act, Chapter 2, 1956 Statutes of Canada, of such sums as are lawfully payable to the Canadian Wheat Board for the benefit of certain Canadian wheat farmers and to draft and recommend the form of articles of impeachment for this misdemeanour.

When I first filed my private members' motion I asked, in the form of a letter to the government House leader (Mr. MacEachen), whether the government, because of the importance of this issue related as it was to the business of the House, would see fit to accelerate the bringing forward of that motion under terms of an agreement which would limit the time for debate but would provide for the question to be put at the end. The House leader refused that request, as of course is his privilege, and this with other reasons accounts for my bringing forward the proposed motion now.

The question then is for me to place before the Chair sufficient facts and precedents to warrant the request I have made that the motion in the terms indicated above be put to the House after receiving due debate. The facts, of course, will be limited to those which I think should be made known to the Chair and will be submitted not to argue the merits of the motion in terms of trying to persuade hon. members to accept it—I hope that will come later—but merely to convince the Chair that this is a motion of substance which needs to be put and, of course, that the precedents and practices of the House warrant the Chair in entertaining the motion and, by putting it, placing it in the custody of the House. What in fact is in issue is the right of myself or of any other member to bring forward a substantive motion of this kind and have it put to the House. The gist of the facts is not really in issue, but I think the Chair is entitled to have at least some knowledge of the facts so it may be understood that there is in fact a prima facie case, in the same way that a person who has been charged must first go through a preliminary hearing to determine whether there is enough evidence to warrant him being committed for trial.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Most of the facts have been well ventilated. There is an act called the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act which places a mandatory burden upon the government and, in particular, upon the Minister of Finance to make certain payments to the Wheat Board, which in turn are used to defray expenses of the board and thus indirectly benefit the farmers who have their net receipts from the Wheat Board as a result of the sale of wheat increased to that extent. The government has admitted, by returns filed in the House which are a matter of record, that moneys are owing for one crop year and for part of another. The act provides that the moneys are to be paid on a monthly basis. Various members of the government have repeated unequivocally that they do not intend to make these payments. I would add in this regard that if the action of the Minister of Finance, who under the act is charged with responsibility, is, as I assume it to be, the collective action of the government and the cabinet, then they are all tainted with the same misdemeanour and this would be in