HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, July 6, 1955

The house met at eleven o'clock.

PRIVILEGE

MR. DREW—REFERENCE TO PROCEEDINGS IN HOUSE OF COMMONS ON JULY 5

Hon. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I rise in connection with a matter of privilege affecting myself and every other hon. member of this house. Yesterday I introduced a motion seeking an adjournment of the house to debate a question of urgent public importance, namely the negotiations which we thought were then being conducted between the government of Canada and the government of Poland in connection with wheat transactions. We have made it perfectly clear that what we were doing was seeking a discussion of procedure by which our money is handed out for deals of this kind. I am not going to extend the argument with respect to trade with communist countries. As I made clear yesterday, the matter has nothing to do with trade with communist countries as such but is rather a transaction by which the Canadian taxpayer is called upon to put up money to support these deals. When this matter was raised Your Honour took the motion into consideration and ruled that the matter should not be dealt with.

The grounds on which you made the ruling were grounds that have a bearing on the question of the privileges of every one of us if we believe we are entitled to accurate information in this house and to knowledge of the subjects that we are discussing passed on to us at appropriate times by the members of the government. As found in *Hansard* for yesterday at page 5682, Your Honour, in explaining reasons why you questioned at first the propriety of proceeding with the motion and why you subsequently ruled that it should not be proceeded with, had this to say:

As I recall it a question was asked Friday and the reply was given by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) that this matter is still pending.

That was the transaction with Poland with regard to the sale of some 9 million to 10 million bushels of wheat. Your Honour continued:

The information given by the Prime Minister Friday was to the effect that the negotiations in respect of this matter were not completely terminated. Therefore the matter referred to in the motion could not be a definite one. I have *Hansard* here for Friday, July 1, 1955, and I find that at page 5557 the Prime Minister is reported as saying:

"I know that the negotiations have been proceeding, Mr. Speaker, in what we consider to be a satisfactory manner, but I have not been informed that they have been concluded. The negotiations did deal with a large quantity of wheat, and did deal with the insurance by the Export Credits Insurance Corporation of a substantial portion of the price to be paid within twelve months, I understand."

Then Your Honour continued:

Apparently that is the situation with respect to this transaction . . .

Mr. Marler: "As of last Friday".

Mr. Drew: Yes, of course, that was as of last Friday, but the minister will, I hope, recall, if he was in the house, and, if he was, he was an exception among the ministers—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: What about yourself?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hees: Listen to the wolves howling.

Mr. Garson: You had better look at your own record.

Mr. Speaker: May I ask hon. members to restore order. While I am on my feet, perhaps I might clear up the situation by intimating to the Leader of the Opposition that yesterday I advanced two reasons. One, as I recall it, had to do with urgency of debate, and that was the main reason for the ruling I made. The second reason I stated was that the matter, in my view, was not of a definite nature because of the fact that in my estimation the negotiations pertaining to the transaction referred to were still pending. I quite understand the feelings of the Leader of the Opposition when he wishes to raise a point as a matter of privilege—

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, I think you should—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, I think you should permit me—