

Privileges and Elections

to these committees without submitting a motion for the formal approval of the house.

An hon. Member: So can you.

Mr. McGrath: But whom does this advantage? It is really to the advantage of the government. They were defeated in committee on November 28, notwithstanding their majority on the committee and in the house. But it will never happen again. In future, when a committee meets without a majority of government members present the whip will merely note the absentees, go to the clerk's office, have the names of the absentees removed from the list of committee members, and replace them by hon. members who are able to be present. So everyone on the other side of the house will be happy. What a farce the committee system of this house has become! If they continue in this way committees will become merely rubber-stamps for the government party.

Mr. Deachman: You agreed with it.

Mr. McGrath: Important as my resolution is to the people of Newfoundland, there is a principle at stake here involving the way in which committees of the house are to conduct themselves during the remaining years of this parliament. This is a matter of real concern. I submit that my resolution is of historic significance in this regard because that was the last time a member of the opposition will ever get a resolution through in committee.

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I repeat what I said to the hon. member for Manicouagan. I believe he was poorly used in this affair. I levelled no charge against him personally; I was sorry he was absent from the house due to illness when this matter was under discussion. As to his friend, the hon. member for Montmorency (Mr. Laflamme), the chairman of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, I compliment him on the way in which he conducted himself in the committee. I compliment him on the way in which he conducted the committee, although I disagree with his report. If we had more committee chairmen like him there might be some hope for the committee system even under the new rules.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Forest (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member who has just resumed his seat, I sat on the committee on privileges and elections and I attended three or four sittings devoted to the study of the

[Mr. McGrath.]

matter raised by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

It is obvious that today the hon. member has not impressed the members of this house any more than he impressed the members of the committee on privileges and elections.

I should like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the committee on privileges and elections sat at the request of the hon. member and that its terms of reference, which he had himself suggested and which were approved by the house on December 10 last, were clear and precise.

The question was simply and solely to determine the reason, valid or not, why a certain resolution which had been passed by the committee on transport, on November 28 last, had not been included in the second report which was adopted at the beginning of the sitting and which was tabled in the house the next day, that is on November 29.

Now, the terms of reference of the committee on privileges and elections required that it merely determine whether the normal, regular, legal procedure had been followed in that instance.

• (1:50 p.m.)

Now, as well in the committee as in this house, the arguments of the member were completely off-base. The committee of privileges and elections was not supposed to discuss or deny the importance or urgency of the matter brought up in the resolution of the member at the end of the sitting of the committee on transports; nor was it supposed to interpret the intention or the professed intention of the hon. member who presented the resolution. In any event, the member is no rookie; he has been sitting here for several years and he should be expected to know the rules.

Now, the committee on privileges and elections sat and heard the chairman and the secretary of the committee, as well as the law clerk and parliamentary counsel of the House of Commons, Mr. Ollivier. After having heard those witnesses, the committee readily came to a conclusion, which was obvious to almost all the members of the committee, except two, that there was no question of privilege, and that said resolution had been omitted in the report merely because to include it, it would have been necessary to make a proposal to that effect, and this was not done. The committee, after having heard the witnesses, reached that obvious conclusion.