

*Privilege—Mr. Rodriguez***PRIVILEGE**

ALLEGED RESTRICTION OF RIGHTS OF MEMBERS OF STANDING COMMITTEE

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege of which I have given you advance notice. To put this question of privilege into some perspective, I have to tell you the background of what caused me to raise this matter.

This morning, the Standing Committee on Employment and Immigration met and a resolution was passed. The resolution was passed because all members from the Government side voted for it while Members of the Opposition and one Conservative Member voted against it.

The resolution was that members of the committee could not contact the researchers, hired by the committee of Parliament and paid for with taxpayers' money through the House of Commons, unless we got the permission of the chairman of the standing committee.

Under the Standing Order 97(1) of this House, the committee has the power to retain the services of expert, professional, technical and clerical staff as may be deemed necessary to carry out its mandate.

A group of government Members came into that committee, having shut down the committee by removing its Chairman last week, and they encroached on my privilege as a Member of Parliament to carry out my duties as a Member by saying that I cannot contact the researchers hired by the committee with the budget that has been allotted to the committee by Parliament, and that I cannot ask them for help in carrying out my duties as a MP, unless I go through the Chair.

If we were to extend that to its logical conclusion, Members of the Opposition could not contact the Clerks of the House for advice on matters pertaining to the operations of the House or our conduct in the House unless we went through the Chair. Can you imagine that? We could not talk to a Page and give a Page an instruction, be it to bring a glass of water or whatever, unless we went through the Chair. We could not contact the legal beagles who are attached to the House to give Members advice in drafting Bills unless we went through the Chair. We could not contact the researchers of the Library of Parliament unless we got the approval of the librarian who is a servant of this House.

I would suggest that my privilege, the privilege of other members of that committee and, by extension, the privileges of all Members of the House, no matter on what committees they sit, have been breached and encroached upon by this particular motion passed by the Conservative members of the committee this morning.

It is noted that the Opposition voted and argued against the motion. We raised all of these points in the committee. We objected strenuously to the motion, as did the Hon. Member for La Prairie (Mr. Jourdenais). I know that he is *persona non*

grata in the Caucus of the Conservative Party, but the fact is that having done him in as chairman of the committee, they sought to deliver the *coup de grace*, which was to limit opportunities for members of that committee to carry out their duties under the McGrath report's new view of committees in this House, which is that committees are masters of their own destinies and have the ability to spend their budgets on hiring research staff.

I think it was an abuse of our privileges for the majority to deal with the committee in the way it did this morning. I suggest, if you find there is *prima facie* evidence of a breach of privilege, that you refer this matter to the appropriate committee for examination.

● (1510)

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the sentiments expressed by my friend from Nickel Belt. Once again in the ninth inning we see the Government call upon its bullpen of parachute artists to descend upon the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration and poison the work of that committee. That committee, along with perhaps the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, was the flagship committee with respect to tackling major issues and producing recommendations through a number of excellent reports.

We saw that poisoning in the John Quigley affair and the Georges Grossmann affair. Last week the Government did an end run around the previous chairman. Today it proceeded to terminate the committee's research director without a shred of evidence to suggest that the research was incompetent. That attempt failed, but then unfortunately government Members proceeded to pass a motion which suggested that until the research needs of the committee are dealt with, which will take until the end of this year, no member of the committee will be able to access the research staff of the committee unless he or she goes through the chairman of the committee.

I said in committee, and I say it here, that I will refuse to go along with a motion which I believe is an affront to the privileges of each Member of Parliament. Access to the research staff of the committee, seconded from the Library of Parliament, is not the sole prerogative of any individual Member. Those researchers are responsible for providing assistance and direction to 282 Members of Parliament without requiring the written consent of a committee chairman.

While committees are theoretically supposed to be masters of their own fate, I believe there is good cause to be alarmed by a resolution which restricts the freedom of any Member of Parliament. These researchers are paid by the tax dollars of all Canadians. Not only is it an affront, it is a waste of taxpayers dollars. The researchers are there to complement the work of Members. If we decide we need to utilize their services in order to enhance our work, then this motion does nothing but