

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 24, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. HORNER—REGULARITY OF ALL-NIGHT SITTING BY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Mr. J. H. Horner (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I should like to rise at this time and raise a question of privilege affecting all members of the House. Last evening, unknown to other members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, when the meeting was called at 8 p.m. there was a firm intention by the government members on that committee to sit until the committee was exhausted.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Horner: I should like to move, seconded by the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Korchinski):

That the question of the validity and regularity of the sittings of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, which began at 8 p.m. in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 23rd of March, 1971, and continued thereafter until 7.30 a.m. o'clock in the forenoon—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Shame!

An hon. Member: It was an idiotic thing to do.

Mr. Horner:

—of the 24th day of March, 1971, and of the proceedings at such sittings be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

I might explain that there was no prior consultation with the other parties.

Whether you like it or not, Mr. Speaker, you are directly affected because Standing Order 88 reads:

The hours of attendance of the respective officers of this House, and the extra clerks employed during the session, shall be fixed from time to time by Mr. Speaker.

Prior to eight o'clock the clerks employed in the Standing Committee on Agriculture were all notified that there was going to be an all-night sitting. Having been duly notified, they arranged among themselves to work in two shifts, some to work up to midnight and some to carry on until the committee adjourned.

With regard to when a committee shall adjourn, Beauchesne's Fourth Edition, citation 303, section 3, reads:

• (2:10 p.m.)

Committees should be regularly adjourned from day to day—

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The Standing Committee on Agriculture has not been regularly adjourned for a long time. The citation continues:

—though the Chairman is frequently allowed to arrange the day and hour of sitting, but this can be done only with the general consent of the committee.

There was no general consent. I wish to draw particular attention to the words, "the Chairman is frequently allowed to arrange". To me they suggest that there should be prior arrangement or prior consultation. That is the whole purpose of steering committees, they are set up to advise on the arranging of committee sittings and what witnesses ought to appear. No steering committee arranged the all-night sitting of the agricultural committee. It was done by a secret method.

Mr. Greene: The hon. member can't stand the heat.

Some hon. Members: The same old bunch.

Mr. Horner: May I refer to Standing Order 65(10), found at page 72 of the Standing Orders, which clearly states:

In a standing or special committee, the Standing Orders of the House shall be observed so far as may be applicable, except the Standing Orders as to the seconding of motions, limiting the number of times of speaking and the length of speeches.

In that connection may I also quickly refer to Standing Order 2 which relates to hours of sittings of the House. I do not think that the question of the hours that a committee can sit and when it shall adjourn is specifically spelled out, either in Beauchesne or in the Standing Orders. But surely, Mr. Speaker, in employing staff and in guarding the privileges of each and all members of the House, one of the basic principles and duties under our parliamentary system is to protect the rights of minorities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Horner: Under our parliamentary system we must protect minority rights so that minorities may be heard and listened to in a frame of mind that is conducive to good legislation.

I contend that last evening a number of major amendments were suggested and moved in the committee and that on two particular occasions the Chairman ruled out amendments without even hearing argument as to why they should be accepted as being in order. He automatically ruled them out of order.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Horner: He ruled rather authoritatively and in a manner unbecoming of a chairman who is, in essence, a replica of the Speaker of the House.

An hon. Member: Impeach him.