

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday March 12, 1991

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND CORPORATE
AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I wish to give notice of a question of privilege, and I would like to take a few minutes, not very long, to explain my point.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations is not meeting because there is no chairperson. The former chairperson resigned September 9, 1990. The committee has not met since. The committee—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry, but I have to interrupt for a minute. What was the date of the resignation?

Mr. Gauthier: September 9, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Gauthier: The committee does exist because it was struck some months ago by this House, but it has not met because there is no chairperson to preside over the deliberations. In fact, it is a hoax to pretend that the committee exists when it cannot study the material which is referred to it by this House.

When the House referred vote 1c of the Supplementary Estimates for the Privy Council on February 28, some 11 days ago, to the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations, the estimate in question represented \$17.9 million and touched on the Spicer Commission's work. The House

technically ordered the committee to scrutinize the expenditure of public money and asked members of that committee to report to it by March 21 this month, in a few days.

Anything, Mr. Speaker, in my view, that would impede the examination of those estimates is unparliamentary and would put members of the House in an untenable situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the privileges of all members will be breached, because they will be unable to perform their duties as elected representatives, and one of those important duties is the traditional one of examining the Estimates, to subject government spending to careful scrutiny, on behalf of our constituents, the Canadian people.

[*English*]

Further, this committee is not sitting because of a flaw—and that is my point of privilege—in our Standing Orders.

Standing Order 106(1) obliges the Clerk of the House to convene an organizational meeting of each standing committee mentioned in the report of the Striking Committee, per se, within 10 sitting days after that committee has reported and the report has been adopted. However, there is no provision in our Standing Orders at this time for electing a new chairperson when a vacancy exists.

As a result, the House must fall back on an old tradition which put the responsibility of convening a committee organization meeting in the hands of the government Whip. This is a tradition that we had prior to the McGrath reform.

Mr. Speaker, I refer you to Beauchesne—

[*Translation*]

Fifth Edition, at citation 579:

(2) Organization meetings have always been called upon the instruction of the Chief Government Whip when the House refers—

I repeat, “when the House refers”: