

*Privilege—Mr. Allmand*

The Hon. Member's complaint—and presumably it is the complaint of other members on the committee who join with him—is that if the Post Office is doing this, it ought not to be doing so because it is forcing unemployed workers to act as strike-breakers.

The Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East has clearly stated to the Chair and to the House, as I am sure he would, quite frankly, that he does not know whether this allegation is in fact true. However, he says that what he wishes and what other members of the committee wish to do is have a meeting of the committee so that the matter can be pursued.

The Standing Order under which the Hon. Member seeks recourse within the committee—and Hon. Members will note that I said “within the committee”—is Standing Order 92(2), which reads as follows:

Within ten sitting days of the receipt, by the clerk of a standing committee, of a request signed by any four members of the said committee, the Chairman of the said committee shall convene such a meeting provided that forty-eight-hours' notice is given of the meeting. For the purposes of this Standing Order, the reasons for convening such a meeting shall be stated in the request.

As has been pointed out by the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray), it is a Standing Order which has just been confirmed by the House. The Hon. Member for Windsor West argued that because it is a new order, Citation 76 from Beauchesne's Fifth Edition, which was given to the Chair by the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, is not relevant. That citation is to the effect that it is not for the Chair to interfere with the internal workings of a committee.

It is the Chair's view that the citation in Beauchesne's to which the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary referred is not made irrelevant at all just because there are some new rules and, as a consequence, the Chair must pay a lot of attention to that.

The general rule is that a complaint about the workings of a committee is not something with which the Chair in normal circumstances is entitled to interfere or to try to set right, unless of course it is in fact a question of privilege that is carefully defined—and it has been so for decades—as something that is being done which makes it impossible for or diminishes the capacity of Hon. Members to do their duty as Members of Parliament.

The complaint the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East brought to the Chair is one which is, certainly in the minds of some Hon. Members, a serious one, and it may well be in the minds of most Hon. Members of this place. However, I cannot make this decision on the basis of the complaint itself.

What the Unemployment Insurance Commission is or is not doing is, as the Hon. Member said, not clear yet. Even if it were clear, that cannot in itself be the basis for a ruling of privilege by the Chair. As legitimate as the point may be, the Chair must remind Hon. Members that it is the responsibility of the Chair to rule on procedural matters, not on matters

extraneous to the procedure, no matter how important they may be in fact.

The Hon. Member has asked the Chair to intervene by saying that the privilege of Hon. Members has been breached as a consequence of one of two things, or perhaps both; first, the majority of the committee having decided, apparently, that they do not want to meet until after the summer is over, and second, the refusal, at least so far this morning, of the Chairman to convene a meeting as a consequence of a notice given to the Chairman on behalf of four members pursuant to the rule.

Whatever the rule might have been intended to mean, other than how it appears on its face, the Chair is in a difficult position in this case because the Chair must read the rule as it is actually stated. What the rule says is, “Within ten sitting days of the receipt”. I quote these words, but the effect is that within ten sitting days of the receipt of a notice—and I am assuming for the purposes of this ruling that the notice was properly given—the Chairman shall convene a meeting and forty-eight hours' notice must be given of that meeting.

The Chair reads that to mean that under this rule the Chairman must convene that meeting or must give notice of that meeting within ten sitting days of the receipt, which means that the meeting could take place some days, certainly, after receipt of the notice.

The difficulty of the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East and of the other members who want this meeting is that unless something should change—and of course the Chair assumes nothing at this point, except that there is some expectation that the House will adjourn this coming Tuesday—the chairperson of the committee may not decide to set a date or give notice to have a meeting during the next three sitting days, that is, today, Monday, and Tuesday. If that should happen, the next sitting day the rule would apply to would be sometime after the House reconvenes in September.

● (1030)

It is not for the Chair to comment on whether the chairman or other members of the committee ought or ought not to make some special effort to comply with the request that has come in. It might very well be that Members would prefer that the Chair did not comment at all on what they want to do. It is certainly not the place of the Chair to do so.

It is because, at least as of this morning, the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East and the other Members who have asked for a meeting have had no response one way or the other, except a clear indication from the committee that they do not want to sit until September under after the House reconvenes, that this complaint is brought to the Chair.

As I have said, the matter is not one that is frivolous. It is certainly one that this particular committee, if it were disposed