

Routine Proceedings

general stewardship of committees from our perspective, that I might have some influence on whether or not the 49th report is adopted.

I am not suggesting that the transport committee is being boycotted as a means of coercing me into adopting this report, I am only raising the question that if this should prove to be the case, would that be an infringement upon my privileges?

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you review the matter and give us the benefit of your consideration.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on the same point of privilege. As the transport critic for the Liberal Party and the Liberal caucus and as the member who put in, under Standing Order 106(3), that the Transport Committee come together—which it has to do within 10 days on this question of the Hamilton Harbour—I feel, quite frankly, that my rights to do a job on behalf of the Canadian taxpayer, certainly have been violated this morning by the non-show of the Conservative government members.

All members know that the quorum of the committee is eight. All members also know that when the Conservative government members intentionally stay away, *en bloc*, it basically paralyses the work of that committee. If this is left unchallenged, it would set a precedent that I do not think would be too helpful either for this place.

Whatever the issue at the transport committee, whether it is the Hamilton Harbour situation, or the CN Route, or the election of the new chairman, we can differ between political parties as to the outcome. The positions taken by committee members whether they be on the government side or the opposition side can be debated and we can dispose of the business of the country. That is the job we are supposed to do.

But it is quite frustrating, to say the least, when despite our best intentions and despite the fact that we asked for this meeting according to the standing provisions of this House that, not only are we unable to put forward our positions but there is no business at all.

Quite often you hear that for the backbenchers of Parliament, the greatest opportunity is in the standing committees. We tell our constituents and we tell those who visit this place that, by and large, the greatest work done by individual members of Parliament is not necessarily in that 45-minute daily broadcast known as Question Period but, in fact, behind the scenes, in the standing committees where we cross the *t's* and dot the *i's*, in terms of the legislation passed by this place.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that when the standing committees come to a halt and are unable to function and do the work, not only is it a disservice to the subject, but it is infringing absolutely on the privileges of members of Parliament. It is in committee where members probably make the greatest contribution.

I know the member for Hamilton East and others wish to speak on this point. I would ask on behalf of myself and our caucus, Mr. Speaker, that you seriously look at this point of privilege because it affects the rights of members of Parliament on all sides. If ruled out of order, it would set a very dangerous precedent because not only will it paralyse the work of the transport committee, which has a number of interesting dossiers in front of it, but the work of other committees.

I hope that your deliberations on this matter bring it to an early resolution so that we in this place may have the direction of the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton East. Briefly.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Very briefly, Mr. Speaker. In determining whether in fact we have a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege which I believe you will find, Mr. Speaker, you should be aware of the fact that Hamilton City Council has already looked to all their federal members of Parliament for leadership.

I know for a fact that the member for Hamilton West was in Hamilton last night, had that assurance and gave the full assurance to the city council of Hamilton that this issue as going to be dealt with under the Standing Orders, which was our full right.

When a member of Parliament gives that commitment to a city council that has passed a unanimous resolution