

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 15, 1969

The house met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. BROADBENT—TABLING IN FINANCE COMMITTEE OF COST-BENEFIT STUDY—MOTION TO REFER TO PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS

Mr. J. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege arising out of the tabling last Thursday, May 8, at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs of a document labelled a "cost-benefit analysis". This document was requested by me at a prior meeting of this committee, as reported on page 2045 of the committee proceedings. The chairman at that time indicated that it would be printed as an appendix to that day's proceedings. Although this was not done at that time it did appear as an appendix to the committee proceedings last Thursday, following a commitment made in this house on Wednesday, April 23 by the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Forest).

The document was requested originally, Mr. Speaker, because in the context of a discussion on military research and development at the committee's hearing on April 1, the assistant deputy minister asserted that a cost-benefit analysis that had been done by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce showed that probably benefits would exceed costs at the ratio of 24:1.

● (2:10 p.m.)

However, Mr. Speaker, the document which was finally presented to the committee was not, in fact, a cost-benefit study as prescribed by the Treasury Board Manual Planning Programming Budgeting Guide. In fact it is a one-page collection of items which bears no resemblance to a cost-benefit analysis. The committee, in short, was not presented with what was promised.

I raised this matter at the earliest opportunity as a question of privilege at the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs. This morning, Mr. Speaker, the chairman of that Committee ruled against my question of privilege and asserted that

since the parliamentary secretary to the President of the Privy Council had stated in this house that a cost-benefit study would be produced for the committee, a question of privilege should appropriately be raised in this place.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move—

—that the subject matter of this question of privilege be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections to determine the course to be taken to obtain the promised cost-benefit analysis.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 17(2) the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) gave notice to the Chair of his intention to raise a question of privilege. I think I should mention to him that although the provisions of the Standing Order indicate that a written statement showing the substance of the matter to be raised shall be filed with the Chair, there is not much advantage in informing the Chair about one hour in advance of the sitting of the house that a question of privilege is to be raised. The point raised by the hon. member is contentious, and at first blush I doubt whether it is possible to refer from one committee to another committee a question considered in the first of these committees.

A similar point I believe was raised by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) some weeks ago, when he suggested that the motion which had been considered in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications ought to be referred for further consideration to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. As I said, the problem raised by the hon. member has some complexity. Perhaps I might have an opportunity to look at the matter more closely and, later in the afternoon, after I have had a chance to look at the record, to give a ruling.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): May I remind Your Honour that the subject matter of my question of privilege to do with the motion for a certain matter to be considered by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections is still before the house for debate.