

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I was present at the committee at the time in question. I just want to very briefly bring two things to the attention of the Speaker.

One, of course, is that the Erskine May precedent or rule that has been brought to your attention is superseded by our own traditions here in Canada as demonstrated in citation 492, page 354 of Beauchesne's fourth edition. It explains quite clearly that the *sine die* rule has been utilized here in Canada in the past.

Nevertheless, and probably more fundamentally, the ruling in question by the chairman at that particular time was not contested in any way, shape or form, to my knowledge, when it was handed down by the chair of the committee.

That is all I have to say at this time, except to indicate that I and several other members of the committee did not receive any prior notification that this item was going to be raised today.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take much time on this either, and I apologize to members opposite. I want to clearly indicate to them I had no warning of this coming up myself on a day that is dedicated to the budget debate. So I want to be very quick.

My first point is that I think the argument has already been made regarding Erskine May and whether or not that applies in this situation. I do not believe it does. I believe it has been superseded by our own Standing Orders and by our own practices.

Second, you cannot put a question to a committee that you cannot answer. For example to make my point, here in committee of the whole the chairman always says "Shall I rise and report the bill?" Now, if the House were to say no, obviously they could not rise and report the bill.

• (1520)

We are in precisely the same circumstances here. I think the committee did act within its mandate. Citation 760 of Beauchesne's sixth edition, subsection (3) states:

Privilege

The Speaker has ruled on many occasions that it is not competent for the Speaker to exercise procedural control over the committees. Committees are and must remain masters of their own procedure.

I do not want to take any more time of the House. I think the argument is very clear.

Mr. Gilbert Parent (Welland—St. Catharines—Thorold): Mr. Speaker, to identify myself in this debate, I am the chairman of this legislative committee. I say I am the chairman because to my knowledge the committee has not formally been disbanded.

I take notice of the remarks of the hon. member who spoke earlier from the other side of the House. I would point out to the Chair, in making his judgment, it is not my intent here to take sides one way or the other. I simply give this information to the Chair and to all members for their consideration.

I believe the duty of the Chair is to prepare himself or herself for all possible contingencies. To that end, I asked the Clerk of the House to research what my responsibilities would be as the chairman in the event that certain scenarios unfolded.

As it turned out, I was informed that one of the motions made was perfectly acceptable in terms of the rules of the committees and of the House and I therefore proceeded on that basis.

The chairman of a legislative committee is always in the hands of the members of the committee. If there was an action on my part which was improper then I beg the Chair to make a ruling to that effect so that we can proceed as it would be directed by the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: I do not need to hear further argument. I am sorry, the hon. member for Kamloops.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to prolong the discussion, but I do want to acknowledge the fact that the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, who has raised this issue, is a dedicated member of the Private Members' Business and raises a very critical issue.

In light of the fact that we want to get on with the budget debate, would it be possible to request to you, Mr. Speaker, that we set aside the consideration of this issue for another moment in order to hear further interventions. Most of us did not know this was coming