

Question of Privilege

support of my contention that the chairman of our committee—who has otherwise been an excellent chairman—exceeded his authority, that he issued his release on a letterhead which has the following printed at the top: "Chairman of the Standing Committee, Procedure and Organization." In other words, the release appeared to have been given in the name of the committee, whereas the committee itself gave the chairman no such authorization.

I protest this action because it seems to me it is not in line with the tradition of impartiality which chairmen should follow and which our committee, in particular, has been enjoining on the chairmen of all the standing committees.

Mr. D. Gordon Blair (Grenville-Carleton): First, Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank both hon. members who have spoken for having given me notice of their intention to raise this question of privilege. I think everyone in the house will appreciate that they, like myself, are concerned about the proper operation of the committee system, and certainly that there should be no partisan abuse of the position of chairman.

I have had a certain amount of experience with this complicated question of presenting rule changes, not only to hon. members but to the public and to the press. I think hon. members will be aware that the proposal contained in the committee's formal report consisted of three proposed orders of the house, and without reflecting upon the excellent draftsmen responsible for such orders, I think it is clear that the wording of the orders is in technical language not readily understandable to either the public or to the gentlemen of the press, who have to meet a deadline of some kind when announcements of this sort are made. Therefore, I undertook on my own initiative to prepare what I thought was a fair and proper summary of the three standing orders which were recommended by the committee, and I stand by that summary. I think that anybody who reads it would in general agree that it is not a partisan statement but an attempt to explain the text of the standing orders.

The position of a committee that sits in camera is rather difficult. I must say that in the interest only of avoiding undue discussion I refrained on Friday from raising a question of privilege of my own. As recorded at page 10453 of *Hansard*, after my report had been tabled the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) rose in his place and stated:

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I point out that this is a report of the Liberal members of the committee only. It does not have the support of any members of the opposition.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is true.

Mr. Blair: I suggest there is some infringement on the privileges of those hon. members who are members of my committee in that this statement is not accurate. As everybody knows, this report carried with it in its majority recommendations the substantial concurrence of all members of the committee.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is not true.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear.

Mr. Blair: In connection with this question of press releases I should also like to point out that before the house opened on Friday morning the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre distributed a long, three page press release—

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Blair:—setting forth his opinions and views on the recommendations of the committee. I am not suggesting for a moment that he is not entitled to express his opinion, but what I do say is that perhaps this might indicate that there is a reason why the chairman should have undertaken to prepare an explanatory press release.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. According to the standing orders the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) gave the Chair some hours ago notice of their intention to raise this matter. Anticipating that there might be a motion and lengthy debate, the Chair spent most of the luncheon hour considering the alternatives open to the Chair, to hon. members and to the committee. I am sorry that I cannot use all of the knowledge that I gained during these two hours of study; perhaps I will have an opportunity to do so on another occasion.

For the time being, in view of the fact that there is no motion presented to the house by either the hon. member for Edmonton West or the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and also in view of the fact that, if I may say so, the very question raised by the hon. members is now before the Committee on Procedure and Organization, I suggest that it is not for the Chair to decide in what way the responsibility of the chairman of the committee should be considered, but rather for the committee itself to make a recommendation to the house.