

Privilege

I am sure the hon. member might want to discuss the matter with other members, but I have a serious enough matter to deal with without going off on what somebody might or might not have meant because they made an irritable comment. I am in the hon. member's hands. If he wants to bring this matter back in a separate application, of course I will hear him. I would prefer that it not get mixed up with this one.

Mr. Langdon: I thank the Speaker for that sense of direction. That was certainly my sense as well. Because there was a reference to it earlier and because I was the person who was the subject of the particular issue, I felt that if the Speaker wished to hear detail on it I was prepared to provide it. I in fact would prefer to raise it separately.

However, with respect to the point which is more directly of concern in front of us this afternoon, I want to refer particularly to the nature of the declaration which was put in front of the committee by the Chair of that committee. I will quote from it. This was an order from the chairman of the committee with reference as to how we were to deal with the goods and services tax. Within that order is the following:

—in putting any amendment to a clause on every clause for which such amendments are proposed, the mover will have two minutes to explain his amendment, and (b) there will be one minute allowed to each of the other parties represented in the committee to reply or debate the amendment, and (c) the Finance Department representative will have one minute to respond. This will permit five minutes of debate on each amendment.

Perhaps I could explain, Mr. Speaker, why this seems to me to be an important point of privilege in the context of—

Mr. Speaker: If the member would let me intervene, first I know about that and, second, I will be looking at all the material. But in fairness to other members who wish to address the Chair, I must start to insist that the points be very brief. I have listened very carefully and gone on much longer than usual in an application from a committee.

I do not think the hon. member is assisting me very much in reading out the order. The order may or may not be a good order or a bad order. What I am looking at here very precisely, because I have been asked to do it by those who have led the argument, is a process and if that process amounts to a breach of privilege. That is the question I have to decide.

Unless the hon. member can give me very much more, I would ask that he defer and allow me perhaps to hear one or more members very briefly. I think I am bound to turn now to the other side of the Chamber.

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, if I could at least have the chance to connect my point to the issue of privilege, I quote from citation 16 of Beauchesne's of which I am sure the Speaker is aware:

The privileges of Parliament are rights which are "absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers". They are enjoyed by individual Members, because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its members;

My point with respect to the form of this particular order is that it prevents people, including myself as a member of Parliament, from operating on that committee as a member. Instead, I am required to accept an order which forces each party to have just one minute's chance to speak or react to a particular amendment. It seems to me that that is a gross violation of my privileges as an individual member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for co-operating and being brief. The hon. member for Prince Albert—Churchill may have something to add. I will recognize the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

Mr. Gauthier: Thank you, I—

Mr. Speaker: I am very sorry. I have overlooked an hon. member and I will come to that. The hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap, and again I do ask him to be very brief.

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to rise on this point of privilege dealing with the inexcusable actions of the chairman of the House finance committee as a result of last evening's events. We have already heard very eloquent arguments in the House regarding the fact that a motion before the House or committee can in fact not be withdrawn without unanimous consent.

As well, the Standing Orders essentially do not provide for the kind of arbitrary and indiscriminate unilateral actions that the chairman of the committee had presented last evening.

• (1630)

I would like to present argument and construct argument as to why the actions of the chair of the finance committee in fact frustrated my abilities as the member