

in another way in another place. With great reluctance I have to indicate to him that he is out of order.

There are some other questions of privilege which the Chair must deal with, and I will hear first the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie).

EXTENSION OF DEADLINE FOR COMMITTEE STUDY OF CANADA-U.S. TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege has to do with questions raised in the House today. I see the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is here. I hope he will stay and give us a few minutes of his time to listen to this question of privilege.

It concerns, to use his words, the important national function which the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade could fulfil with respect to the trade agreement the Prime Minister has entered into with the U.S. Our contention is that our ability to do that, and therefore our privileges as Members of Parliament, is being severely inhibited by the fact that we will not have the text of the agreement the Prime Minister wants the committee to look at until either the end of November or early December. Given that the agreement supposedly has to be signed on January 2, that means that the committee would have maybe two weeks in which to look at the actual text of the agreement, discuss it, and travel across the country holding hearings.

This is not Question Period so I cannot ask this of the Prime Minister, but I say to you that our privileges as members of the committee, charged with the important national function which the Prime Minister mentioned in Question Period, are affected because we are being put in the position of having only seven to 14 days to fulfil that function. I say to you and to the Prime Minister through you that that is not in compliance with parliamentary reform. That is not parliamentary involvement. That is not a meaningful opportunity for public input. If the Prime Minister wants to live up to the commitments he made to this House in this respect, then the Government has to seek an extension of that January deadline so Members of Parliament can do the work they were elected to do.

Mr. Speaker: I may be able to assist Hon. Members by indicating to the Hon. Member that while he may very well have a complaint, it is centred around something that happened in committee. It may well be that the Hon. Member has a point in what he has said as well. That point has now been heard. I have to say to him that under the circumstances it is not a question of privilege.

I can only suggest, because I cannot give an order in this direction, that perhaps he and other members of the committee might meet to find some way to resolve the difficulties he has put forward. It may well be that Hon. Ministers, having heard the point raised, might be able to assist. In any event, it seems to the Chair that the committee can indeed do some work, although the complaint raised by the Hon. Member that

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before that work can be completed it would be certainly appropriate to have the document seems to be without question. In any event, it is not a question of privilege. It is a complaint. It has been heard in the House, and I hope Hon. Members will try to respond in some meaningful way.

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)): Mr. Speaker, I find myself in some difficulty. Earlier this morning there was an application under Standing Order 29 for an emergency debate. The opposition Party in that situation lays its complaint upon the Table and there is no place for the Government to reply. I would have appreciated the opportunity of having my hon. colleague, who has left the House, put the position. It is only fair that the position on this matter go on the record given that we now have a specious question of privilege.

The committee met yesterday with lots of notice. Committee members democratically decided, under parliamentary reform which never would have been dreamed of under the previous Liberal Government, according to Standing Order 96(2) to study the subject matter of the essence of the agreement reached between Canada and the U.S. The committee decided to study it. The committee decided it wanted to travel. The committee decided it could hear witnesses before seeing the agreement which my friends complain about. There is no question, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said, that once we have that agreement it will be laid upon the Table, as was the essence of the agreement itself the very day after it was signed.

It is absolute nonsense for the Opposition to get up and claim that something is being railroaded and ramrodded when all the committee is doing is studying. We have watched committees do that under parliamentary reform brought in by this Government time after time after time. I might say that it has been done on a lot of delicate subjects so far as the Government is concerned. Yet we have sat here under parliamentary reform and it has happened. Now, when it is a subject matter which the Government is proud of—

Some Hon. Members: Cool down, Doug.

Mr. Lewis: The Hon. Member who complains is an NDP Member. The NDP Premier of Manitoba will not even recall his Legislature to deal with this. The Liberals complain, while at the same time Liberal provincial cabinet Ministers are travelling around Ontario without the benefit of this agreement. This is nonsense.

● (1540)

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor (Mr. Langdon) is rising on the point of order in response to the response of the Hon. Minister of State. I will hear him for a moment.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the point of order which the Deputy House Leader has put forward, I think it should be