

of the same standing committee. My second observation in this regard is that this Chair does not exercise procedural control over standing committees. Let me reaffirm my opinion that standing committees are and must remain the masters of their own procedure.

Unless the rules of this House are changed in some way I have no intention or desire of entering into, by way of appeal or review, in any way, shape or form, the decisions that ought to be made or taken into account by a standing committee. I am certainly not going to look over the shoulder of any chairman of any committee, or enter into a procedural matter by saying it was proper or improper.

There is a question of privilege before the House, and I at no time intend to restrict comment on that matter. The honourable Member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk) raised a question of privilege the other day. I heard a number of contributions on that matter. I intend to listen to the fullest possible development of any question of privilege, but that is not going to draw me across the line as far as supervising the procedures of committees by way of suggestion or appeal.

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To put the matter in perspective it might be more appropriate to say that I have certain powers to permit or prohibit something here but I do not have the same powers to permit or prohibit certain things in the standing committees.

The honourable Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) raised what the honourable Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) described as a question of privilege. I should like to draw his attention to the fact that it was raised not as a question of privilege but as a point of order. I think that is quite proper. It concerns business in the standing committees. It relates to proceedings and in fact is a procedural question pure and simple. It is in fact a point of order concerning the privileges of honourable Members, as others have said, if it is not a point of order, they would quite readily volunteer to put forward the matter as a question of privilege if that would change its character. I do not think it would.

Honourable Members have said that when a parliamentary secretary asks questions of his own Minister in a standing committee he in fact interferes with their right as opposition Members to ask questions. You do not have to go very far from that proposition to see the difficulty that precisely the same thing would apply if it were another government Member proceeding to take up some of the time of the committee and asking the very same questions of the Minister. I do not say that in an effort to put forward an argument on one side or the other of the case. I say it only to illustrate the impossible position in which honourable Members are seeking to put the Chair by asking the Chair to pass judgment on a description on a second hand basis of events which have taken place in the standing committee, a description, which is certainly far from agreed upon, of the argument and nature of the proceedings.

For many years in this House the Chair has refrained from sitting in appeal on procedural decisions taken in standing committees. Honourable Members are seeking my guidance as to what steps I would take if I were Chairman of the standing committee involved. Surely honourable Members have the intelligence to appreciate the reasoning, that I have exposed under considerable fire, in respect of my attitude toward the role of parliamentary secretaries at proceedings over which I preside. However, with all due respect to the honourable Members who participated in this debate, let me point out that that is the limit of my authority and, unless procedural changes are made, that remains the limit, and I do not propose to attempt to exercise a nonexistent authority to appeal decisions of standing committees in procedural matters.

As I said, my reasoning is obvious and clear in respect of a situation in which one honourable Member asks questions on one day and answers them on another. I exposed my reasoning on that, and one can only speculate as to what I would do if I were sitting in the Chair of the standing committee involved. I do not propose to cross that line unless in some way Members of the House deem it proper in their wisdom to amend the procedures that have been followed so carefully which keep the Chair out of questions of order—and essentially this is a very serious and important question of order—in the standing committees. A question of order it is and the Chair will not sit in appeal on questions of order in standing committees.

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The honourable Member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) raised a point of order in respect of a precedent. The fact is that the Chair has stayed out of the proceedings of the standing committee, as required by the citation in Beauschêne, before the proceedings of the committee were reported to the House. Once the proceedings of a committee are reported to the House the House has authority to come to grips with what has taken place in the standing committee. That is the clear distinction. If, for example, the matter before a standing committee is legislation, the matter then comes to the House at the report stage if amendments have taken place in the standing committee. The fact is that an appeal against procedural rulings in the standing committee is not provided for, but the same amendment can be and is frequently introduced in the House at the report stage that was refused on procedural grounds in the committee. Therefore, the House has to address itself as a whole to the very same decision that was taken in the standing committee.

When the proceedings of a standing committee, such as the one referred to by the honourable Member for Crowfoot, are reported to the House, a number of arguments may be put forward relating to the proceedings that took place leading up to the report, and then the House is seized with the proceedings that take place in the House in a regular procedural way. That is quite different from asking the Chair to make a judgment on a secondhand description of a decision that was taken in a standing committee.