

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 11, 1970

The House met at 2 p.m.

### PRIVILEGE

MR. THOMPSON—ATTITUDE OF GOVERNMENT  
TOWARD ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

**Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege relating to the adjournment debate, and specifically to the adjournment debate of last night involving three grievances raised by opposition members.

The adjournment debate was instituted following a trial period to allow members on both sides to raise questions about problems to which the government had not given satisfactory answers. I am convinced that this procedure has worked well in the past. However, I am concerned that, because of the growing and obvious disregard of the government toward questions raised by backbenchers, not only is the adjournment debate being relegated to the position of being a useless appendage but the institution of Parliament is being downgraded as well. Likewise—and this is why I am forced to appeal to Your Honour at this time—the rights of members of this House are being disregarded to the extent that our usefulness, either in debate or in representing our constituents, is being aborted.

Specifically, in the adjournment debate last night I raised a question regarding the policy of the Postmaster General and Minister of Communications and the Post Office Department to close all low income post offices in the country. While agreeing to this policy as it relates to some low income rural post offices, I questioned the validity of the blanket policy of closing all such post offices. I cited three cases, and had time permitted would have added a fourth, where the closing of the post office not only had an unjust and an adverse effect on the community but where the rural route delivery replacement service would be more expensive than the cost of continuing the present rural post office. I also questioned the minister as to why he refused to seek the opinions of the citizens concerned, and why local officials who were familiar with the situation were not consulted before taking such action.

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My question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, is simply that neither the Minister of Communications nor his Parliamentary Secretary were present in the House last night to hear my question. Instead, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport read a prepared statement which had no relevance whatsoever to the question I raised because it was prepared before my question had been heard. I believe that this is a transgression of the rights of the members of this House.

I would also say that the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley followed me with a question relating to the storage of grain, and again the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport read a prepared statement which was absolutely irrelevant to the question that was raised.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, because you are the honourable custodian of our rights, and because you are the one to whom we must appeal when we are in difficulty, as we are here, I appeal to Your Honour to take note of this question of privilege and to take such action as is necessary to bring the government to recognize its responsibility to the members of this House in adjournment debates.

• (2:10 p.m.)

**Mr. Speaker:** As the hon. member for Red Deer has, according to the regulations and the Standing Orders, given me notice of the question he wanted to raise at this time in our proceedings, I think I should direct his attention and the attention of hon. members to the provisions of the relevant Standing Order 40(3) which refers to the proceedings at ten o'clock. It states in part:

A Minister of the Crown, or a Parliamentary Secretary speaking on behalf of a minister, if he wishes to do so, may speak for not more than three minutes.

The hon. member will recognize that the terms of the Standing Order, which is a regulation of the House, as it now stands actually allow any minister or a parliamentary secretary to any minister to answer a question posed to any other minister. Because of this it is quite in order under the Standing Orders as they now exist for a Parliamentary Secretary to reply to a question directed to any minister.