

Inquiries of the Ministry

If Your Honour agrees that such a motion would be in order, I am sure the hon. member for Peace River would be happy to proceed with his motion which reads as follows:

That a special committee of five members, having the powers of a standing committee under Standing Order 65(8), be appointed to examine and inquire into the continuing refusal by the appropriate government ministers to pay, as required under the Temporary Wheat Reserves Act—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is seeking the floor on a question of privilege and suggests that there is a question of privilege which ought to be referred to a committee along the lines of a motion that is already on the order paper under the sponsorship of the hon. member for Peace River. That, of course, has given me an opportunity to determine whether the motion as posed by the hon. member for Peace River is truly a question of privilege or a privileged motion, which is what the hon. member for Oxford is seeking to move now in association, I assume, with the hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Nesbitt: No, Your Honour.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is asking the Chair to rule whether there is a prima facie case of privilege. I would remind the hon. member that normally under the Standing Orders of the House he should give the usual notice of a question of privilege.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair is entitled to be heard by the House without all this noise.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I assure hon. members that I am fully aware of all the circumstances of what is going on in the House at the present time. The suggestion is that the motion being made now is a motion of privilege. I am not prepared to entertain a lengthy debate on whether this is a question of privilege. It is the responsibility of the Chair to determine whether there is a prima facie of privilege. I am quite prepared to make my ruling on this point. The hon. member for Oxford seems to think that I have interrupted him. This is the last thing in the world I would wish to do and I will hear him further if he thinks he has other considerations to put forward for the guidance of the Chair.

• (11:50 p.m.)

Mr. Nesbitt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was reading the motion to refresh the memories of hon. members. Or at least of those who have not seen the motion of the hon. member for Peace River. I shall not continue because it is on today's order paper. Your Honour has brought up a point that perhaps I have not given adequate notice to the Chair in view of the fact that this is a question of privilege. I submit in this regard that my question of privilege arises out of the reply of the Acting Prime Minister to the hon. member for Calgary North during the House proceedings and I raised the point at the very moment and as quickly as I possibly could. It is my understanding of the rules—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I know that rule. The hon. member does not have to explain it to me.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to the hon. member, and I made this point a moment ago, that I appreciated it was not necessary to give the usual notice. I am telling the hon. member now that I appreciate that point. If he has additional submissions to make for the consideration of the Chair they ought not to be related to this point on which I am in perfect agreement with him.

Mr. Nesbitt: I am glad to hear that, Your Honour. I hope your Honour would give very careful consideration to this point. This matter has become one of great urgency. I feel that Your Honour should rule there is a prima facie case of privilege since the privileges of all members of this House are affected by what the minister in charge of the Wheat Board said last night and which is on the record. Surely hon. members should have an opportunity for the earliest possible debate to express their views on this whole matter. It would seem to me that Friday afternoon is a good opportunity to do this. Many members can be present this weekend. There is no great urgency in respect of the present business before the House that it could not wait for half a day.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I appreciate the points made by the hon. member. He is suggesting, of course, that there should be a further special debate on this matter which has been raised by other hon. members by way of questions and motions during the last week or so. As I said, I would find it very difficult to overlook the fact that there has been a lengthy debate. Perhaps some hon. members would not want me to take that into consideration, but I do not think I can do that. I have to take into account that, the matter having been raised by the hon. member for Calgary North, the hon. member for Vegreville, the hon. member for Regina East and others during previous days, after much consideration and a great deal of hesitation I thought that the matter was so important that it justified the application of Standing Order 26. It is because of that that I thought a special debate should be held. Of course I could have suggested yesterday that the debate not be held yesterday but take place this afternoon and this evening, as now suggested by the hon. member for Oxford. In any event it has already been held. As to whether there should be a further debate today, I would have to be satisfied that there is a prima facie case of privilege and before the matter would go before the House for consideration of a motion and for determination by the House as to whether there is a question of privilege. That is exactly the ruling I have to make at the present time.

The suggestion made by the hon. member for Oxford, and I am sure by other hon. members who support his point of view, is that there is a question of privilege. Hon. members will remember that the matter was brought to the attention of the Chair earlier on a question of privilege and which was considered at that time. The suggestion at that time was that the law was not being followed and that there was therefore, in all the circumstances which have been explained for the guidance of the Chair, a breach of parliamentary privilege. Again, after looking at the