

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act

Incidentally, I hold no brief for the particular organization I have mentioned. I am sure that these people, together with representatives of consumer groups and others, wish to appear and speak for themselves. Instead, apparently they are to be allowed only to present briefs and to involve members of this House as lobbyists representing special interests. This is a grave situation and I maintain it cannot be permitted to pass without question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baldwin: I could say a great deal more, but I submit a prima facie case of privilege has been made out. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with regard to this letter and the questions involved I move, seconded by the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Bell):

That the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections be directed to examine the whole question of this letter dated December 29th and sent by the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs to Mr. C. G. E. Steele, and all of the surrounding and relevant circumstances, including any specific instructions the Clerk might have received and what general instructions have been issued to the Committees Branch.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member knows that he cannot make such a motion unless the Chair has decided that there is a prima facie case of privilege.

Mr. Baldwin: I understand that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The Chair is not prepared to receive the motion at this time. The Chair will allow the hon. member for York East to say a few words in reply since his conduct as chairman of the committee has been particularly impugned. Thereafter the Chair will take the matter under advisement.

Mr. Steven Otto (York East): Mr. Speaker, this is a nice way to start the second part of the session. May I point out to the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) that this is not a question of privilege. The committee is master of its own proceedings; I believe Your Honour has held that to be so many times. It was the steering committee of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs that decided some two years ago that when a bill is considered only departmental officials and the minister are to be heard and that when a subject matter is considered witnesses will be invited. A representative of the hon. gentleman sat on the steering committee and so did others. This decision was approved unanimously by the committee, and these are the rules that are being followed today.

Unlike the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, may I advise you that the minister did not have anything to do with this. Indeed, I had to reprimand the minister for presuming to tell the committee how its business should be conducted. The committee is conducting its business in accordance with the ruling made by the committee. The committee can still change its mind if it wants to; that will be up to the committee.

Mrs. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

[Mr. Baldwin.]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. There can only be one question of privilege before the House at a time.

Mrs. MacInnis: This is a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair has indicated that no debate will be allowed at this time. I do not think there should be a debate. If the hon. member has another question of privilege I will hear it in a moment, but in any event I indicated that the first matter would be taken under advisement. If the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway has a different question of privilege, I will now hear her.

Mrs. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, it is equally well a point of order. My point is that an inaccurate statement has been made by the chairman of the committee and as a member of the steering committee I want to set it right. May I do so?

An hon. Member: Go ahead.

Mrs. MacInnis: The chairman made the point that the steering committee had decided that no witnesses would appear when legislation was referred to the committee. We did not make any such decision, Mr. Speaker. We made the decision that when the subject matter of a bill had already been discussed by the committee we would not consider it necessary to hear witnesses after second reading. The subject matter of the packaging and labelling bill has not been before the committee at any time.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

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● (2:20 p.m.)

THE LATE JOSEPH-ALFRED MONGRAIN

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, may I refer with the deepest sorrow to the death of Mr. Joseph-Alfred Mongrain, the member for Trois-Rivières, who passed away on December 23.

A member since 1965, Mr. Mongrain was devoted to the interests of the citizens of his riding and gave constant proof of his untiring dedication to his work. His active participation in municipal affairs well prepared him for the role he was to play in the House of Commons. Mr. Mongrain leaves behind him the memory of a generous man, a man of ideas, independent in spirit, for whom politics was a total commitment.

I know that all members join with me in paying tribute to his memory and in extending the sympathy of this House to his family and friends.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to associate myself with the tribute paid by the Acting Prime Minister to the late Mr. Mongrain. He was a man with whom we all had very pleasant relations, a man who displayed the ability to discuss matters in the House with vigour without in any