

Agricultural Committee Discussions

ment. It arises out of the fact that I was denied, as a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, during consideration of Bill C-196 in a clause by clause study, by the vice-chairman of the agricultural committee who was in the chair at the time, an opportunity to participate in a discussion on a clause of the bill to which an amendment had been proposed, despite repeated requests by me directed to the Chair for recognition.

The incident arose during last night's sitting of the committee on Agriculture. An amendment had been proposed by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner). In fairness to the chairman I should say that I was granted one opportunity to comment on the amendment, after the opening remarks by the mover of the amendment.

Subsequently the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) presented his rebuttal to the amendment, at which time certain arguments were presented which I felt should have been corrected. I requested recognition from the Chair and patiently awaited my turn for recognition. However, after points of order had been raised during which I participated, at the conclusion of my contribution to the points of order I requested that I be heard at the appropriate time on the amendment to the pertinent clause which was under discussion. The present committee system and the reporting of the proceedings do not permit me to produce the report of the proceedings, which would attest to the fact that I verbally requested recognition before the amendment was put, because the report is not yet printed.

● (2:20 p.m.)

Under the previous system where the entire membership of the House participated in clause by clause discussions it may not have been necessary for a member to rise on several occasions to present arguments for or against a particular clause of a bill because other members had an opportunity to contribute and often covered the point. You will agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that this practice was allowed and that on no occasion was a member denied the right to speak, and only when all arguments had been assessed was the question put.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Korchinski: Under our present committee system the Committee on Agriculture has on it eight members of the official opposition, which is 11 per cent of the total composition of the membership of the official opposition in

the House of Commons. Because of the inability of the other 89 per cent of members to be present during committee proceedings because of commitments to other committees, the case for presenting arguments for or against a clause rests heavily on those members who comprise the committee.

In hearing evidence presented in the form of briefs there has been an arrangement worked out whereby equal opportunity has been granted to all members to participate in the questioning of witnesses. This had general approval by members of all parties in the committee. However, when the committee is charged with the responsibility of studying a bill and a clause by clause study is being carried on, the situation is somewhat different from the hearing of briefs. Because of the heavy responsibility that is placed on individual members of our party, who constitute only a small percentage of our total membership in the House, adequate opportunity should be granted for a thorough discussion of a given bill.

I was denied that opportunity to pursue an argument following a statement by the Minister of Agriculture. The vice-chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, who was in the chair at the time, showed his political bias by ignoring requests by me for recognition to speak on the particular clause and allowing himself to be guided by the persuasion of the supporters of the government to put the question.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Korchinski: The majority of the government members on the Committee on Agriculture last night were members who have displayed little interest in the grain industry and who, because of their background, have a limited knowledge of the consequences of the passage of this bill. The bulk of the government supporters appeared to have only one interest in mind, and that was the swiftest passage of the bill through committee in order that it may be brought back to the House prior to the summer adjournment. It was suggested by a member who was drafted to the committee last night that a time limit be imposed on the proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege is complicated by the fact that all the rules that have been drafted in the House pertain to the proceedings of the House of Commons. The rules are not drafted to take into account committee proceedings. To argue that the committee is master of its own proceedings