

Privilege

not prepared to approve, an order of the House or a proposition that has been put before the House.

I ask the hon. member for Calgary West to tell me how, if we believe in a committee system, we can continue to go without a committee chairman all these months.

The other thing I want to say is this. I probably cannot intervene, but I am being asked to intervene, and this is not the first time. The fault may be on both sides of the House, but for goodness sake, I ask hon. members to get it settled.

Mr. Hawkes: The Speaker is always on dangerous ground when he gets applause from one side of the House.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

An hon. member: That is right.

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. Let me make it very clear. I am not defending either side of the House in this. I say to the other side of the House be careful about applauding a Speaker, whether it comes from one side of the House or the other.

I spent a lot of years in opposition, I do not have to tell you how many. I thought we had made some very, very positive reforms and changes. All I am saying is that this House and this country, because I do not know that I can do anything about it, are in trouble if we let a committee go from September until now without a chairman.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I have to step back to the year 1985, when this government and this party brought parliamentary reform to this Chamber.

An hon. member: Apply it.

Mr. Hawkes: I hear one of the new members who came into this House in 1988 saying: "Apply it". I look her right in the eye and I say: "We have tried". It is the opposition that does not respect the principles of this place when it comes to committees.

An hon. member: Yap, yap, yap.

Mr. Hawkes: Yap, yap, yap. The less you know, the more likely you are to yap in this place from time to time.

A very important element of parliamentary reform was the existence of a striking committee that would name

the membership, the House would approve the membership and members on standing committees would be entitled to the retention of that seat within 10 sitting days of the commencement of the fall session until one year later. Nothing anybody in this Chamber could do, except that individual, would change the membership of that committee. People were entitled to resign but Whips could not take the seat away. Year by year by year, it was a conscious decision of this Chamber. The violation arose last September when the opposition refused to acknowledge the striking committee report naming the membership for the year we are now in.

• (1130)

There would be no problem if precedents had been followed by the opposition in accepting the striking committee report.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Angus: Tell the whole story.

Mr. Hawkes: I will tell the whole story. We have had a whole lot of informal meetings, and I will tell the whole story.

You talk about partisan, petty politics and maybe the member for Vanier did not know what he was stepping into, but we have a situation today where the government, when it comes to committees, and the standing committees of this House cannot meet their responsibility to govern. There are two roles in this Chamber: there is an Official Opposition and an opposition, and there is a government. The government has the responsibility to govern.

We will take this one specific committee example. We call a meeting this afternoon. We elect a chairman with the current membership, and the voting power is in the hands of the opposition and not the government. That is true of seven of the 21 committees in this Chamber right now, and it has been true since last September and they know it.

An hon. member: They are playing games.

Mr. Hawkes: They are playing partisan political games with the future of this country, national unity, Spicer committee and everything because they want to control the committees.

Mr. Angus: That's a lie.