

Privilege—Mr. James

25, 1987. The Hon. Member asserted that I, as chairman of the legislative committee studying Bill C-204, acted in a biased manner. After careful perusal of *Hansard* and other documents, I believe my rights as a Member of the House of Commons have been called into question and I would like to speak to that point.

The Hon. Member indicated there was a delay of 12 sitting days after second reading before the first meeting of that committee was held.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member has been given the floor to respond to an application made a few days ago by the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood on a question of privilege. I know Hon. Members are leaving the Chamber for other duties and I ask that they extend the appropriate courtesies to the Hon. Member so he can make his presentation to the Chair.

Mr. James: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The date of second reading of Bill C-204 was May 29, 1987. By letter dated June 9, 1987, I was appointed by you as chairman of that committee. I received that letter of notification on Wednesday, June 10, 1987. My schedule for Thursday, June 11, through Monday, June 15, was totally booked, and so the first meeting of the committee was held on the following Tuesday, June 16, 1987. The first witnesses were from the Departments of Labour and National Health and Welfare.

● (1510)

In point two the Member indicated there was a 19 sitting day delay between the third and the fourth meetings. The date of the third meeting was June 26, 1987; the date of the fourth meeting was June 17, 1987. The days do not compute, so I do not exactly know.

I would like to advise you, Mr. Speaker, that on that particular day, the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood stated in committee, "Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do not think we can realistically plan any future meetings before the end of June. What I think we should do is plan to start work right promptly when the House resumes". That was under the assumption that we would reconvene on September 14, as the House calendar indicated. We then established a work schedule based upon that situation.

Additionally, the Hon. Member indicated in her accusations that there was active obstruction in the committee during the period of June 26 to October 6. During that period, I as chairman of the committee was given instruction by the committee, as the minutes will indicate, to contact the witnesses who might want to appear before the committee. I was also given authorization by the committee to advertise during the summer, if it was so advised. That was done during the summer. The House was recalled on August 11 for a special emergency session to deal with the refugee legislation. The House was originally to be reconvened on September 14.

I was then appointed the chairman of the committee on Bill C-55, on August 14, 1987. That committee met for 55.5 hours, heard over 30 witnesses, and reported to the House on September 15, 1987. On September 17, 1987 the meeting of the committee on Bill C-204 reconvened.

I wish to notify you, Mr. Speaker, that the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood who has raised the allegations was not in attendance at that meeting. At that meeting we discovered from communication that the clerk had with the witnesses that there were certain problems in receiving from the witnesses the specific proposals, résumés, and briefs that we should get from them. At that meeting of September 17 it was decided by the committee that we should write to all those who had been suggested by the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood and other members on the committee, and advise them of specific dates to reply by, and hear back from them. That was decided then to be September 15 and September 30 respectively.

Following that, the committee then carried on and had meetings on October 6, 8, 13, 15, 20, 29; November 3, 5, 17, 19, 24, and 26.

Another allegation brought forward by the Hon. Member for Broadview—Greenwood was that the chair had acted in a biased manner. I submit to the House the letters that I have written to my constituents wherein I stated, "As chairman of the legislative committee on Bill C-204 it is essential that I perform my duties as the chairman in an impartial and neutral manner". That is the manner in which I carried out my responsibilities as chairman. Nowhere in the minutes do I find an allegation by the Hon. Member who has brought forth these allegations challenging the chairman or the members of being biased.

I have instructed the clerk to work closely with the Hon. Member's office, as she is the author of this Bill, in ensuring that all the witnesses were received and given the opportunity to be heard. I challenge the Hon. Member to find and produce any evidence that I have operated in a biased manner. I am seriously concerned over those allegations, and they certainly impinge upon my privileges as a Member of Parliament who has attempted to act in an unbiased manner, hopefully with good management, to hear and deliberate upon this very important legislation.

I appreciate the opportunity to be able to rebut the allegations made.

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reply to the concerns raised by the Hon. Member. When I raised the issue of privilege and felt that the work of the committee was being held up, I did not at any time state that it was the exclusive responsibility or the actions of the chairman. I raised a whole list of problems that had occurred, and I think the responsibility must be shared among a number of members.