

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
May 29, 1990

MINUTE NO. 13
May 29, 1990 at 8:30 a.m.

1. PRESENT: Mr. Van Mulligen in the Chair and the following Members: Anguish, Baker, Britton, Hopfner, Muller, Lyons, Rolfes, and Swan

Officials

Provincial Auditor's Office

Fred Wendel, Acting, Deputy Provincial Auditor
Brian Atkinson, Acting Assistant Provincial Auditor

Comptroller's Office

G. Kraus, Comptroller
T. Paton, Director, Financial Management Branch

2. The Chairman made the following statement:

I refer Members to the question of recorded divisions in Standing Committees. Last Thursday, May 24, 1990, during divisions on separate motions, Members' names were called out and recorded individually, at the request of a Member of the Committee.

This has clearly been the practice in a number of jurisdictions and substantiated by *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, 5th edition, citation 601. However, such practice has not developed in standing and special committees of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

The practice of having recorded divisions in Committee of the Whole and in Committee of Finance was introduced by the Assembly on December 2, 1976 (*Rules and Procedures of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly*, Appendices, page 2, paragraph 2).

While the Assembly at that time did extend the practice of recorded divisions to Committee of the Whole and to Committee of Finance, the Assembly did not extend this practice beyond those Committees to standing and special committees.

I refer Members to a meeting of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations where, on April 24, 1990, a request by a Member for a recorded division was ruled out of order on the very procedural grounds which I outlined.

Therefore, in the light of the above, I remind Members that recorded divisions are not a practice of Standing and Special Committees of this Legislature and that last Thursday's recorded divisions should not be construed as a precedent.

3. After debate, the Chairman reserved his decision on a point of order respecting the right of the Committee to determine its own procedures.
4. The Committee resumed consideration of a motion by Mr. Anguish:

That the Committee refer the impasse concerning the agenda to the Legislative Assembly.

And debate continuing.

5. Mr. Lyons moved in amendment thereto, That the following be added after the words "Legislative Assembly":

and; whereas government members of the committee have refused to allow Westbridge Computer Corporation to appear as witnesses in either the 1987-88 review or the 1988-89 review of the public accounts or auditor's annual report; therefore be it further resolved that the Westbridge Computer Corporation be called before the Public Accounts Committee to answer questions related to valuation of assets.

6. The Chairman ruled the amendment out of order on the grounds that it is not relevant to the main question. Whereas the main question dealt with a Committee report to the House, the amendment merely adds an intent to invite Westbridge Computer Corporation to appear before the Committee. The Chairman cited *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, 5th Edition, cit. 426: "It is an imperative rule that every amendment must be relevant to the question on which the amendment is proposed."

7. Mr. Lyons moved, in amendment to the motion of Mr. Anguish, that the following words be added immediately after the word "Assembly":

"due to the refusal of government members, to call Westbridge Computer Corporation for review in either the 1987-88 and 1988-1989 fiscal years, before the Public Accounts Committee".

After debate, the question being put on the amendment of Mr. Lyons, it was negatived.

And the question being put on the main motion, it was negatived.

8. The Chairman made the following statement:

At this time I would advise the Committee I will be stepping down from the Chair for at least the remainder of the meeting.

I do so in order to consult with the Members who have just left.

The structure of this Committee reflects the basic acceptance of the fact that there is partisanship in this committee. I refer of course to the practice of appointing a Member of the Opposition to be Chairman.

This practice began in the United Kingdom and was intended to ensure that there would not be any restrictions on the investigations of the Public Accounts Committee into government spending.

For this reason the Chairman also takes an active role in deliberations and in questioning.

To be denied the opportunity to ask questions about significant expenditures of public monies is a serious business.

To continue to sit in the Chair in the face of a continual denial by the government members of the right of other members to conduct investigations might be construed as passive acceptance of the majority view . . .

To make it clear that I do not condone this shutting down of inquiry I will now leave the Chair.

Accordingly the Chairman left the Chair.

9. Mr. Baker assumed the Chair and, for want of a quorum, at 10:05 o'clock a.m., adjourned the meeting to the call of the Chair.