

Privilege

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, there are many instances in Canada, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and throughout parliamentary systems in the world where the question of the breach of confidentiality of Budget matters has been raised. Ministers of the Crown this morning know that all of us on this side could quote arguments of past instances from them when they were on this side of the House. And later in the day they may find that their words will be quoted back to them.

But I will say, on a very recent incident involving the then Minister of Finance, Marc Lalonde, in 1983 when the present Minister of Justice (Mr. Lewis) and his House Leader at the time were rightly critical of the Minister, that the then Minister at least acknowledged the supremacy of what was involved by having a change made when some information from an alleged document was made public.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Made public by him.

Mr. Broadbent: He had recognized the principle involved by making sure that that did not come back before Parliament as a Budget. This Government had the effrontery not only to claim it can go right ahead with everything it has produced, even though the whole country knows, but the Government used television instead of coming before the Parliament of Canada to present that Budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: It would be perfectly understandable if people witnessing this debate in Atlantic Canada—

[*Translation*]

in the province of Québec, in the Prairies or in British Columbia, all Canadians want to know exactly what is going on, want to understand exactly the reason the Opposition Parties are completely against the Government on this point. I would like to explain.

[*English*]

It is not a question, Mr. Speaker, about the rules that are pertinent to the conduct of some kind of game or sport activity. What we are involved in now is the accountability of the Government for literally millions of dollars of public expenditure, taxpayers' money—indeed, billions of dollars. So the secrecy that we talk about as being essential in the parliamentary tradition has behind it an entirely appropriate concern about the public good.

I want to mention just a couple of items that have become public as being seen to be part of what the Government is describing as its Budget. One, the complete privatization of Air Canada. Two, a major change in defence expenditure. When I heard of this yesterday and heard there was no resignation, I asked myself, what time does the stock market close; what time did this information become available? We now know, Mr. Speaker, that that information was available perhaps as early as 2.45 p.m. yesterday. If there was one journalist who had that information and presented it on the public network at supper time, the relevant question that a Minister of Finance ought to be concerned about is who else had it and who may or may not have phoned his or her stockbroker to make a deal on the Toronto or the Montreal Stock Exchanges. If people did that, then I say that the Minister of Finance is responsible—if they did it, I say to him, and he has no way of knowing if they did or not—for privileged access by a small group of Canadians who might have made millions of dollars at the expense of the public, and for that and that alone, the Minister of Finance should be resigning.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: I cannot understand why a Minister of Finance who claims to be concerned about his privileges would speak so briefly about such a fundamental matter without having a motion to refer this to a committee of the House to examine it. If he believes there was no breach of security, why is the Minister not prepared to do the traditional thing and have a committee examine the matter? If he says there was no negligence in any way on the part of his staff or his Department, why will the Minister not have a committee look at the matter? In particular, Mr. Speaker, I say that when the Minister came here and said to the House of Commons and to the people of Canada that he spoke and acted as soon as possible, we know that that is false. For those reasons, among others, there ought to be a committee examining this very serious breach of trust.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: The privilege involved does not involve simply the Minister of Finance. I was informed that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) had attempted to contact me after supper time yesterday. His office was calling, and no doubt this call was followed up by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lewis) who contacted both the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) and myself about this matter. Once I heard there was a Budget leak and had it confirmed that it was on television, I asked myself, did the Minister of Finance—he has not told us this yet—go to the Prime Minister and offer his resignation, which he ought to have done? Did he offer his resigna-