

Privilege—Mr. Baldwin

the *Canadian* magazine allegedly by persons acting on behalf of the Minister of Transport. Therefore, I consider that the principle that parliament has the direct duty to protect freedom of the press may possibly have been grossly violated. If such violation has taken place, then I contend that it directly interferes with the rights and privileges of this parliament properly to perform one of its basic functions. In other words, a minister of the Crown—in this case the Minister of Transport—could possibly, either directly or indirectly, bring pressure on two newspapers to the extent that they failed to distribute the section of their paper carrying an article entitled "The Unhappy Landing of Otto Lang".

● (1510)

It seems to me that there is certainly nothing in the rules of this House, and certainly nothing in the traditions of British parliamentary democracy, that permits a member of the House, particularly a member of the cabinet, to have any part whatsoever in using, directly or indirectly, personal influence to stop publication or fair comment by a free press. This situation requires nothing short of a full investigation by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. In addition, I think the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) should appear as a witness before that committee so that the Canadian people know whether or not it is government policy to allow such things to happen as apparently may have happened here.

There is another aspect of this matter which I believe interferes with the privileges of every member. The duties of a member are fairly well known and rather clearly defined, and I contend that it is a breach of the privileges of all members of the House when one member, or representatives acting on behalf of that member, may have used their positions or their influence for purposes of self-interest, in that it reflects on the image that the Canadian people have of politicians in general and of members of the House in particular. That can only breed an attitude of disdain and cynicism on the part of the Canadian people toward members of parliament, and thereby hinder and damage the ability of members of the House, who have come here to work in the best interests of Canada, to perform their jobs properly.

The article referred to the Minister of Transport in various ways, but I quote only three words. It said he was "aloof", "obstinate" and "sometimes obnoxious". While the Minister of Transport obviously may not agree with this—and all of us would probably not agree with it if it were said about us in particular—nevertheless, is it not fair comment that such remarks in the press should not be suppressed, whether or not the Minister of Transport likes it or whether or not any other member of the House might like it if it were said of him?

Finally, if this incident turns out to be in fact as it has been reported, then I believe the committee on privileges and elections has no alternative not only to consider it but to come to the conclusion that the resignation of the Minister of Transport from the government or his dismissal by the Prime Minister be requested. Indeed, I would go further and say that if the facts are established as being true, the Minister of

[Mr. Cossitt.]

Transport should no longer hold a seat in the House. I have no hesitation in supporting the motion of the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) that this entire situation should be examined by the committee on privileges and elections in order that the people of Canada and the House in particular will know what really happened and that the matter is being properly dealt with.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang:—I believe even some of the words quoted by the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) reveal the absence of any question of privilege here, since the words he quoted suggested that the distribution of these magazines was withheld by the newspapers themselves. There was a difference of view in some quarters as to whether or not that was the right legal position for them to take. But surely the hon. member is not suggesting—and I hope no hon. member would suggest—that a member of parliament is not protected also by some of the laws of the land in relation to libel or slander.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: I know that many of us in politics frequently go a long way in simply turning the other cheek when various instances of defamation arise, and surely in each case it is a personal decision whether we ought to do that. In this particular case I have reached the personal conclusion that it had been done too often and that I should take a stand in exercising my legal rights, and I drew that to the attention of the people who were associated with the particular publication.

I will not say anything more about that, because the actual issues involved may well be resolved before the courts. But I want to say two things. First of all, I believe it important that I take a step such as this because of the increasing tendency of persons in political life to be maligned in such a way that it might be even less attractive for others who might regard a political career as a possibility, to enter that career. Certainly, I may say that it has very serious costs which I wish hon. members would take very carefully into consideration. It may be that as a member of parliament I could continue to turn the other cheek, but in the end I must have regard for the consequences and impact upon the attitudes and feelings of my family and my friends.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: Secondly, I would like to talk about the way the allegations have been brought to the House. I presume that the switch from the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) to the hon. member for Leeds has meant a difference in standard and in approach between them, but you will notice that in introducing this matter the hon. member for Leeds, who ended grandly by suggesting that my seat should be put on the line over the issue, very carefully avoided following certain parliamentary procedures in making a charge by laying his seat on the line.