

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 19, 1962

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. CHEVRIER—REFERENCE TO REPORTED SPEECH
BY PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege arising out of a report in the *Montreal Star* of March 17, 1962 of a speech made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) reflecting on the conduct of members of the opposition in this house. I should like to read the following extract from that paper:

Prime Minister Diefenbaker in a Montreal address last night criticized delaying tactics which he said were holding up passage of important legislation.

By needless debate of the government's supplementary estimates, he claimed, Liberal members were blocking "legislative enactments we wish to place on the country's statute books."

The Prime Minister laid the blame on a "small group of Liberals in the house—"

That statement is not in accordance with the facts. For example on Thursday of last week, as Your Honour knows, after the Minister of Finance—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member need not refer to what happened in the house, as that is common knowledge, and furthermore that matter was disposed of at the time. If the hon. member sees a question of privilege affecting members in the remarks as reported, perhaps he could give me some authority or precedent for the proposition he makes.

Mr. Chevrier: First of all I should like to add another statement which substantiates what I have said. Then I shall be glad to give Your Honour some authority. The Prime Minister went on further to say this, and I quote his words:

"Now," he declared, "we have been held up 14 days by fruitless talk designed to delay the country's affairs. I welcome full discussion but not mere repetition. I don't know the reason. I'll leave the answer to you."

That is an inaccurate statement, because they have not been held up for 14 days.

Then, sir, to come to the point which you raised and which affects the privileges of the opposition in this free parliament, it is this. When the Prime Minister seeks by statements outside the house, which are not supported by the facts, to restrict freedom of debate within the house—and according to the

same press report that is what the Prime Minister was trying to do—I do not think the rules of the house permit the Prime Minister to make these reflections upon the members of the opposition, particularly having regard to the fact that the Minister of Finance indicated clearly that consideration of these estimates should be completed by the middle of the month, the Prime Minister himself said they should be completed by the end of the month, and the house leader said that they—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member's discussion of the matter is, I think, ranging unnecessarily widely. The point he makes is that there is a breach of privilege if an hon. member makes statements outside of the house that are critical of the conduct of members in the house. I have no recollection that such an outside speech has been held in the past such as to raise a question of privilege, particularly where it was a general imputation against a group and not critical of an individual; nor is there anything in the report of the speech from which the hon. member has read to indicate that what was imputed to members of the opposition generally was something which would be morally improper or wrong.

There have been a good many instances in the house when members on both sides have accused those on the other side of blocking legislation, and that has not generally been held to be improper even when said in the house. Therefore unless the hon. member can find some precedent for the point he raises, it seems to me that he would have difficulty making out a case of infringement of the privileges of the house. Perhaps the party involved, the Prime Minister, would like to comment on the point raised.

Mr. Chevrier: May I complete my point? Your Honour has asked me to give you a precedent. I think a precedent has been established by Your Honour, because what in effect the Prime Minister was doing was repeating outside the house what Your Honour rebuked the Prime Minister for doing inside the house; because Your Honour—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the hon. member proceeds, may I say that in my view the circumstances there were quite different. What was objected to there was a remark made following an answer to a question, a