

Privilege

[Translation]

that almost all groups that have attended the hearings here in Ottawa have clearly indicated that they are against this sales tax. Groups, corporations, poor people's groups, women's groups, all groups here in Canada, are against this sales tax.

[English]

The other day, the Prime Minister was seen on television saying that he speaks for the people of Canada, while these people only speak for interest groups. When you have interest groups from Newfoundland to British Columbia representing women, the poor, large and small business and virtually all of Canada, we in this party say that it is the interest groups in this instance who speak for the people of Canada and not the Prime Minister, and he ought to listen.

It seems to us that in terms of parliamentary tradition, whether it was your predecessor or Mr. Roland Michener when he was Speaker of the House who spoke on this, the principle is very clear. The government ought not to be using the funds of the people of Canada for a political, partisan position of the government of the day in advance of a parliamentary agreement. This process started with the previous Liberal government, and to be fair, it was not used widely then, but it was started then. It was the beginning of the view that the government of the day can use the people's own money to advocate essentially political policies before they are approved.

If it was started by the Liberals in the 1980s, the practice has been extended and multiplied almost *ad infinitum* by the Conservatives on almost every major issue that has come up since the Conservatives were elected in 1984. They have used the people's money to do through public expenditure what they ought to have been doing as politicians, which is to persuade the people of Canada directly themselves. This process has got to stop.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: In rising in support of this question of privilege, I repeat that the point is of fundamental importance, but it has been something that other governments have pursued. If we are to put an end to it, Your Honour, there can be no better time than when there is a

tax proposal that is unfair, inequitable and counter-productive in terms of economic growth. In almost every aspect, the tax proposal is not desirable.

What is at issue is the right of Parliament to decide and, after a decision has been reached, then it is permitted for a government to use its offices to declare in an informative way what a factual situation is in terms of the law of Canada.

Your Honour, you have the right, and some of us believe the obligation, to rule against the government on this particular occasion. In so doing, I say not only would you be taking a major step in the process of stopping an inequitable tax to be brought in by this government, but more fundamentally, in reaching such a decision, you will be reasserting the basic principle of parliamentary democracy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Before hearing from the Hon. Minister of Justice, I think it is necessary for the Chair to say for the record that the debate which is taking place is on the question of whether or not the publication of this ad and its contents constitutes a contempt of the House. It is not a debate on the relative merits, whatever they may be or not be, with respect to a proposed piece of legislation. I think that has to be carefully kept in mind and that is what I have to keep in mind in making the decision which is sought in this chamber.

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I start out by welcoming the comment you just made and indicating that I will deal with the argument put forward. However, I would appreciate the same latitude that was accorded to my colleagues who spoke earlier. I do that because I appreciate that they feel it is a serious matter.

I want to preface my remarks by welcoming the House back. I know that members have had an active summer and are anxious to get back to the business of government. We, as you know, Mr. Speaker, wanted to start off today with debate on the bill to establish the Ministry of Forestry. We informed the opposition of this two weeks ago and our speakers are ready. I am not sure whether this is a delaying tactic because their speakers are not ready, but ours are ready, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!