

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that far more was revealed in this confidential consultative process than was revealed to me as a member of the Finance Committee. In the one briefing that the Finance Committee had on this, no secrets were revealed. Yet, this group of 20 has been privy to secrets from last fall up until the present.

It seems to me that a better process for consultation might have been worked out. It is regrettable that one wasn't.

It is also my concern, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance has applied a double standard when it comes to his dealings with Parliament and his dealings with outside groups. It is not unremarkable that the media, which has a lot of columns to fill, a lot of air time to fill between eight o'clock on Thursday evening and the next day, is being allowed almost unlimited access in terms of the number of journalists who may participate in the lock-up. As well, they are permitted to bring in outside tax experts.

My office did not ask for that, Mr. Speaker, when we negotiated with the Minister. We simply asked for some modest increase in the number of people that we could get into the lock-up. The Minister, in his great generosity, said that we could have eight people go in, rather than the six or seven who were permitted for the last Budget lock-up; but then, when we asked for access for five of our researchers along with three MPs, he refused, saying that he would decide who would make up the eight. So, the Minister, in his wisdom, chose to tell each parliamentary caucus who would represent it at the lock-up. And, of course, while the experts from these private sector firms are looking at the documentation today—

Mr. Lewis: What does this have to do with the question of privilege?

Mr. Cassidy: —we will not be able to look at it until tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. While the Chair understands the point the Hon. Member is making, it seems to me that it is a point to be made at another time and place.

The issue before the Chair relates to the fact that there is apparently a group of 20 people who have access to the tax reform papers in advance of the Minister of Finance rising in his place and outlining his White Paper on tax reform. All of these people have taken an oath of secrecy not to reveal anything they learn as a result of that advance look until the Minister of Finance has delivered his statement tomorrow evening.

There is the suggestion that the members of this group of 20 may have some advantage as a consequence of what they have learned in the course of their giving advice to the Government, not just today but over a period of time. That may well be. However, there does not seem to be any suggestion that any member of this group of 20 has wrongfully revealed any information he or she may have, or that the oath of secrecy has been violated. I want to be absolutely sure that I have interpreted the comments of all Hon. Members correctly. It seems

to me that no one is making that suggestion. I want to be absolutely sure that that suggestion is not being made.

As well, I want to be absolutely assured that all Hon. Members are confident that I have grasped the point of the question of privilege, the point being that these advisers, notwithstanding that they have taken an oath, are being given information which is being withheld from Members of Parliament. That seems to me to be the essential basis upon which it is being claimed that there has been a breach of privilege.

If I have not fully appreciated the point, I would ask Hon. Members to ensure that I do.

I see that the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) is rising.

Mr. Cassidy: May I conclude, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, there is no allegation from this quarter of the House that, on the facts as we now know them, any of these 20 people have breached their oath. The Minister of Finance has admitted, however, that at the meetings being held today they are getting advance information. The issue is not that they have breached their oath—nobody suggests that from this quarter—but that they have a 24-hour head start over the rest of Canadians in the use of that information. By the time they are allowed to publish it, they have a lead and an unfair advantage over their competitors, over other Canadians, and over Members of Parliament.

● (1620)

The second submission, just in a word, is that the very fact they have been allowed to see this fiscal information,—and I will not argue the point of budget or non-budget—to be followed by a Ways and Means motion, and the fact that they heard this information prior to any Member of the House of Commons in our regular lock-up and prior to the media participating in that lock-up, in so far as Members of Parliament are concerned is a breach of our privileges. As the custodians of the Ways and Means of the country, the power of Parliament to review taxation or proposed taxation or proposed expenditures, our rights have been infringed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to support the point made by the Leader of the Official Opposition that the actions and attitude of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) breached our privileges.

Mr. Speaker, I could blame the Government for not consulting senior citizens who had been misled by this Government and on two occasions forced the Minister of Finance to backstep in the matter of OAS pension deindexing, and in the matter of unemployment insurance for older workers.