

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

other day in another connection, and that is that when things like this are said, or when improper things are done, it is not just one party in the House or a few individuals here, but it is the whole institution of parliament that comes under a shadow. It is really serious that there is such cynicism in Canada, as there is today, about this institution and about democracy, and we should be taking the most positive steps we can to correct this situation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I indicate our readiness to support the motion that has been presented to you this morning.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I think that the motion which has just been presented should be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections because, on the one hand, if false allegations have been made, I think it is the interest of all members to protect themselves; this is the only way they can protect themselves; and on the other hand, if the allegations are true, the public will know what is going on in Parliament. I for one am very satisfied with the motion, and I think that we must clarify all these allegations coming from all sides and all these so-called bribes we hear about every day. It would be one of the first opportunities for the Committee on Privileges and Elections to shed some light on these matters, and if it is successful in doing so, we will have to continue. That is why I am in favour of this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I should just like to add one word. I endorse the motion, but I want to emphasize something that may have been said in order to make it very clear. Traditionally, we in Canada have had very dedicated men and women in our public service, and traditionally they have been known as people of high integrity. As I read the statement, if it is correctly reported, it is not only a slight on every member of parliament, as well as every person who has been a member, but also a slight on the dedicated people in the public service of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. For very obvious reasons it is clear that the motion enjoys widespread, if not unanimous, support, and I would be surprised if it were not unanimous. If the Chair were to have any hesitation in putting the question at this time it would only be in respect of the ironing out of procedural difficulties which might be involved. I do not see why that cannot be done in a preliminary way by the committee, if in fact the matter were to be referred there.

For example, in respect of the motion it does occur to me that some reflection should occur, until perhaps later in the day or until Monday, regarding the form of the motion itself and other paragraphs that may be added. I wish to make it very clear that there is not the slightest doubt in the Chair's mind that the question ought to be put to the House. After all, it should be stressed that a decision which is made by the Chair is often referred to as a decision as to whether or not a prima facie question of privilege exists. That is a convenient phrase, but the fact of the matter is that it is not entirely correct. What the Chair is doing is

[*Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).*]

simply making a decision as to whether the proceedings ought to be stopped in order to give priority to a motion which has been raised under the title of a question of privilege. There is not the slightest doubt in the Chair's mind that this ought to be done either now or at an appropriate time.

The only reason I suggest a time lag before putting the question is that there are things to be considered as, for example, the language of the motion, which obviously had to be prepared very hurriedly, and, secondly, the powers the committee ought to enjoy, as well as the other powers the House may wish to exercise in respect of this sort of thing. After all, this is a statement not made by a member over whom the House has some jurisdiction, but a statement made by someone outside. It may be necessary that the House exercise some special powers in that regard. It may also be that there may be some conflict with some privileges of a lawyer pleading a case in open court; I do not know. However, it occurs to me that the Chair ought to make clear, and I now wish to do so, that I am prepared to interrupt the proceedings now to put this question or I am prepared to give the House a bit of time to reflect on the polishing of the motion, only from a procedural point of view, to make sure that after reflection the motion in fact does include all the powers the committee ought to enjoy to investigate a matter of that sort. I would appreciate some guidance from the members in that respect.

● (1120)

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what you have said and I think, having regard to the importance of the question, it would be the wish of all members of the House that the committee be completely empowered having regard to the subject matter or empowered to the extent it can be. I for one, as the mover of the motion, would certainly have no objection. I hope those who spoke in support of it and the members of the House generally would have no objection to the delay for the reasons you suggested.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I should like to endorse the position taken by the House Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party on behalf of the government. We are very anxious that this question of privilege should be thoroughly aired and that everything should be done to minimize the effect upon this honourable House of the alleged statement by Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we agree to the delay, but I think it would be a good idea to have the motion finally drafted and presented sometime later today.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair certainly understands that sentiment. Certainly, from my point of view it would be most undesirable to give any indication at all that the House is in any way delaying dealing with this matter. It is a matter of the utmost importance. I wonder, in light of the absence for example, from the motion of the name of the person who is connected with the statement, whether there should be some consideration of the power that the committee ought to have. It might be that during the question period some consideration could be given to