

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 16, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

[English]

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that Mr. Jim Silye, member for the electoral district of Calgary Centre, has been appointed a member of the Board of Internal Economy in place of Mr. Stephen Harper, member for the electoral district of Calgary West, for the purposes and under the provisions of chapter 42, first supplement of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, entitled "an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act".

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

BUDGET SECRECY—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: My colleagues, I would now like to rule on a question of privilege raised on Friday, March 3, 1995 by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, notice of which was given the previous day just after Question Period. I would like to thank the hon. member for raising this matter, as well as the chief government whip and the hon. members for Berthier—Montcalm, Kindersley—Lloydminster, and Kingston and the Islands for their contributions to the discussion. I would also like to thank the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington for her intervention on this matter on March 13, 1995.

[English]

In his question of privilege, the hon. member for Sherbrooke alleged that there had been a leak of the budget prior to its presentation by the Minister of Finance on February 27, 1995. To support his claim, the member drew the attention of the House to the March 2, 1995, edition of the *Hill Times*, and more specifically, to a comment made by the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington found therein. In response to the question "Is there too much secrecy surrounding the budget?" the hon.

member for Guelph—Wellington is quoted as having said: "I don't think so. There were some MPs who were told beforehand if major cuts were coming to programs in their ridings. They asked for that in caucus so they could prepare to answer questions". The hon. member for Sherbrooke then argued that if certain members had "privileged, secret information before budget day" this would be to the detriment of other members and would hinder them in the performance of their duties. The hon. members for Berthier—Montcalm and Kindersley—Lloydminster echoed the member's sentiments and concerns about a certain group of members being privy to information not available to other members.

[Translation]

The procedural issue before us is not a question of budget secrecy per se. Several members cited citation 31(5) of Beauchesne's Sixth Edition to support the contention that budget secrecy was and is a political convention and not a matter to be dealt with under the guise of parliamentary privilege. Indeed, several members emphasized that what was really at issue was the implication of prior knowledge of the contents of the budget by certain members, and I emphasize the word members, and not others. The questions we must therefore ask are, at first glance, does there appear to be a breach of the rights of certain members, and has something occurred which has impaired the ability of members to carry out their duties as members?

[English]

As I have said on numerous occasions, we have a tradition in the House which dictates that we accept the word of an hon. member as truth. Taking the quote of the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington as represented by the *Hill Times*, one might be inclined to agree that there was the appearance that certain members had been given confidential information not available to others. However, in light of the comments made by the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington on March 13, 1995, and the text of her memorandum from which the hon. whip read and later tabled, I accept that the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington was referring to the announcement made outside the House by the President of the Treasury Board on February 21 regarding measures for the downsizing of the federal public service and not to a prebudget disclosure.