

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

● (1542)

I think that my friend, the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), is quite correct in what he has requested. I notice that yesterday he made quite a bit of the precedents in the United Kingdom, and while he did not call for this minister to resign, he pointed out that there have been ministerial resignations. I believe he has taken a very responsible attitude today in admitting that there is probably nothing that the minister did that is wrong and in not calling for his resignation. But the other thing that has not happened which should have happened is the investigation, and I regret very much that the Minister of Finance tried to dismiss this matter so easily. I think it is serious, and I hope that the House will insist that there be such an investigation.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) gave the Chair notice of his intention to raise this question of privilege. He put forward a motion at the conclusion of his remarks today, and I will take the matter under consideration.

There are, however, some remarks that should be made now. It is a matter of course under our practices that any budgetary leaks are considered very serious. Two examples in the British precedents were put forward in support of the notion that a minister who assumes responsibility for any complicity in a budget leak should resign, and that an investigation should take place. In fact, I think it will be interesting for the House to know that in both of those precedents in the United Kingdom that matter was not treated as a matter of privilege. In fact, what happened was an agreement in the House that some investigation in each case would take place; in one case there was the resignation of the minister, and a committee of the House examined the matter, and in the other case a judicial committee was set up. But it is interesting to note that in neither of those cases was the matter treated as privilege.

In addition, we do not have in this situation an acceptance of responsibility. We have an argument which begins with the publication by a newspaper over the weekend or before the weekend. So one of the ingredients that exists here and that did not exist in the U.K. examples is the fact that we have to argue from the very presentation of a newspaper as to whether or not that can be taken as speaking for itself, and therefore leaving the very conclusion which would indict either a minister in the House or someone on his staff who might be responsible. In other words, there is a chain of events that seems to be missing here, and that is something to which I must give consideration.

Furthermore, there is an extraordinary situation related to this budget, and that is, as the minister developed today and as hon. members know, we are not dealing with federal tax cuts; we are dealing with provincial tax cuts. Indeed, it would not have been possible for the minister to come to the House last night without having had some prior consultation, I assume, with his provincial counterparts with whom he was collaborating in effecting some sales tax cuts.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

That being the case, the federal Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) was in a rather extraordinary position in relation to this particular budget. He was not coming to the House to announce tax cuts only in his own jurisdiction; he was announcing tax cuts on which he had elicited co-operation in prior consultations with provincial ministers. The minute the minister is under obligation to consult with some of his colleagues across the country, there is the risk and danger that the information has gone beyond their ears to other sources because, by the very terms of the budget, he had obviously started some sort of consultation which had not been the practice in previous budgets because there had not been the need for this kind of interprovincial and federal co-operation. That is another ingredient which I want to examine.

Finally, the Minister of Finance made this afternoon a most significant revelation, namely, that the original article which gave rise to the question of privilege yesterday raised by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby was an article which appeared in the *Toronto Star* on Saturday afternoon. The Minister of Finance indicated here this afternoon, in the argument, that his final decision in respect of the reduction of the sales tax could not have been taken until he had the accord of his provincial counterparts, which he did not have until late yesterday afternoon.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: That is exactly what the Minister of Finance said. Therefore, his own final decision could not have been made until yesterday. Therefore, the possibility of a positive, confirmed revelation, in advance of a decision taken in respect of the budget, as early Friday or Saturday seems to me to be a logistic impossibility. However, once again let me say that I will have to examine the record to see exactly what the minister said. That is an argument that I must take into account.

These are four very significant aspects of the situation before us which did not exist in the U.K. precedents, and therefore I will give the matter serious consideration before coming down with a final decision.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a correction. Perhaps I have not been understood correctly. What has happened is that I consulted the ministers of finance of the provinces. During the course of the week I was able to make up my mind. I told them that I was not sure to go, and it was only yesterday that I told them I was going. Of course, at no time did any one of them know precisely if I was going or not going. Of course, they could have guessed that I was interested because I was calling them, but at no time did I say I was going. It was only yesterday that we had an agreement that only a few hours before the budget I would tell them if we were going or not going, and I did it yesterday.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would allow a question. I listened to his argument. I am always very impressed by him, and I have said that to him personally and publicly.