

lack of information which surely he must know he, as minister, was entitled to receive before this time.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) has raised, by way of a question of privilege, questions and answers that may have a fundamental relationship to the ability of persons to campaign for membership in this House free from any interference. That was the purpose of the matter raised by the hon. member for Halifax and certainly the very clear tone of the support given to it by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) and the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay) who contributed to that side of the discussion.

The hon. member for Halifax did not accompany his remarks by a motion today which would call for some action by the Chair. He did indicate that, after reflection, if the Chair felt there was a basic matter of privilege involved, he might put a motion in due course. I will therefore give the matter further consideration.

MR. LEGGATT—ANSWERS GIVEN BY SOLICITOR GENERAL
DURING QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege arises as a result of the answers given by the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) in the House today concerning the correction that he made to the answer given to the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot (Mr. Jarvis). In answer to the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot, he indicated he may have been in error by saying that the missing 24 documents were destroyed. He indicated in his answer that those 24 documents in fact may have been mislaid.

My question of privilege is this: while I realize the Solicitor General does not have an obligation to make answer in this House, he surely has some reasonable obligation to this House to inform himself so that he can make some answer. In this particular instance, the records of the RCMP, in terms of the documents that have been destroyed, are available to the Solicitor General. He comes very close to misleading this House by simply refusing to ask the question or get the information before appearing here, on a day when he knows that the major business of the House will deal with his department, and when he knows from news reports he has read over the past three days that it is his department that is under attack. If he does not want to answer and say it is in front of the McDonald inquiry, that is one matter. Another question is whether he should make any kind of reasonable inquiry to determine the accuracy or otherwise of newspaper reports.

It is clear the minister has not done that today. It is clear he has not checked that with the RCMP in terms of records being destroyed, otherwise he would have been able to provide a clear answer to the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot. I submit that comes as close to misleading hon. members on this side as you can get.

Privilege—Mr. Brisco

MR. BRISCO—EXAMINATION OF DEPARTMENTAL ESTIMATES

Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a new question of privilege to seek your advice and assistance. Although there is nothing unusual about a motion under Standing Order 43 being rejected for lack of unanimous consent, it nevertheless brought to bear the question of the failure of certain ministers to bring their estimates before a standing committee.

I am disturbed over the fact that not only have we had such a refusal in the Standing Committee on Labour Manpower and Immigration, but it is perhaps coincidental that for some time now there has been the absence of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Faulkner), the periodic absence of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Milne), and the protracted absence of the chairman of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs.

● (1522)

In spite of the charges and allegations which I have made, and which have gone unchallenged, I am concerned that there should still be the failure to call the estimates of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development before the standing committee. In the face of these facts I would appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to take such measures as would oblige ministers to bring their estimates before the standing committees. What are they trying to hide?

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): I intend to be very brief, Mr. Speaker. I sought to raise this matter today under the terms of Standing Order 43. The Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration has not been called upon to examine estimates since the estimates were referred to it. The committee has nevertheless examined in detail Bill C-8 and Bill C-45. When we were considering Bill C-45 I raised this question of the referral of estimates to the committee—I made a point of it and discussed the matter with the chairman. But at no time have we received any commitment that the estimates would be brought before us. There is roughly one month left for this work, otherwise the estimates will be deemed to have been passed. It is of critical importance that members should be given an opportunity to examine these estimates on behalf of the people.

An hon. Member: It may be only one hour.

Mr. Epp: Whether there is an election or not, the principle remains. The government, and, to be specific, the chairmen of parliamentary committees, have used their positions to prevent estimates being examined, and I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to give us some advice and guidance on the matter and explain what rights we have on behalf of our constituents to examine these estimates. The restriction of time now available to us makes a farce of the committee system.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Without consulting the precedents, my memory, if it serves me well, tells me it is fundamental to the whole system that there be an examination of