

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 2, 1964

The house met at 11 a.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. NIELSEN—REFERENCE TO ARTICLE IN OTTAWA
"CITIZEN"

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal privilege affecting myself and, I submit, every hon. member of the house. I refer to a statement appearing in the *Ottawa Citizen* of Saturday, February 29. It was written in a column by one Christopher Young. The statements to which I wish to draw Your Honour's attention appeared in an article exhibiting a complete ignorance of the law, a lack of the most elementary research and a violent and outrageous partisanship, all calculated to interfere with the members of this parliament in the exercise of their functions. I quote from the article:

In parliament, where an absolute privilege against an action for libel exists, the charge was made this week that Dr. Marcel Chaput may have committed sedition when he said that some people in Quebec were prepared—"brutally"—to let the Queen know that she was unwanted there.

That statement is not true. No charge was made at any time. The writer could have ascertained the facts by a simple reading of *Hansard*. Obviously he preferred to save himself that trouble. I submit that this is either sloppy journalism or deliberate perversion of the truth. My inquiry of the Minister of Justice was whether he would undertake an investigation to satisfy himself whether or not the statement in question constituted a statement requiring action by the minister. A member using words attempting to protect the Queen is now described as extremist. While it is all right, the author suggests in his article, to threaten the life of the Queen, it is not in order for members of the parliament to attempt to determine responsibility. When they do, they are classed as extremists.

On the face of it there was every possibility that the statement by Dr. Chaput did constitute the use of seditious words. In fact the minister himself states in his reply that the words are still being studied. He was, as were all members of this house, greatly concerned. I quote from my remarks as they are reported in *Hansard*. I said:

Does the minister intend to take prompt action with respect to what might be the seditious words used by Dr. Chaput?

That statement is to be found on page 285. I have dealt with the matter at some length, because I felt it was my right and duty to do so. I see no reason why hon. members should, in these circumstances, be subjected to outrageous, ill informed and partisan attack masquerading as fair comment.

The reference to parliamentary immunity is deliberately misleading. No immunity is required in order to ask the Minister of Justice whether he will undertake an inquiry.

Compounding the deliberate nature of this attack is the fact the same statements were made over the public broadcasting service in the C.B.C. program "Viewpoint". As a member of parliament I question the use of public facilities as a medium for partisan propaganda compounded by deliberate error.

In order to complete my question of privilege I must refer to another statement in the same article. Christopher Young goes on to say:

In times of crisis, or of high emotion, there is always an element that tries to narrow the limits of free speech. Eldon Woolliams and Erik Nielsen, the two Tory M.P.'s who demanded "action" on Dr. Chaput this week, are typical of the kind of counter-extremists who come out of the woodwork at such moments.

No member of parliament is compelled to put up with such guttersniping. I deny absolutely that there was any attempt to limit free speech. There was an attempt to find out from the Minister of Justice, or to get him to find out, whether remarks which had been discussed in the Quebec legislature as well as in this house came within the purview of the law. There was tragic proof not too long ago of the lengths to which fanaticism can go in another country. That lesson is still fresh in our minds.

I bring this matter to the attention of the house because I feel this kind of vicious and arrogant attack on members in the exercise of their duty cannot go unnoted. I reserve my right to take further action if further action becomes necessary.

PENSIONS

TABLING OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PRIME
MINISTER AND ONTARIO PREMIER

Right Hon. L. B. Pearson (Prime Minister):
I should like to table copies in English and