

Privilege—Mr. Symes

the part of the arguments which I think are important and are worth hearing—

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Filibuster.

Mr. Fleming: The government can shout filibuster if they want. I am concerned about this issue. Canadians who care about their country know that the CBC has a mandate to promote national unity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fleming: If you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, I briefly want to argue that in fact the position of the president of the CBC contravenes an act passed by this Parliament, directions given to it under the act and rights given us under that act to have access to the Canadian public. For that reason I think it is a contravention of my rights as a member of Parliament and of all members in this Parliament.

A situation where this particular program representing Parliament to Canadians is not interfered with during a federal by-election, is not interfered with when there are provincial elections, but when there is a referendum in a particular province the president of the CBC decides it will be interfered with, is quite inappropriate. He is overstepping his rights. In the Broadcasting Act, if I can simply quote section 3(b)—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member will surely realize he is arguing a case that the president of the CBC may be acting against the tastes of him as a member or the House collectively, or that he may be acting in contravention of a particular statute. Those arguments may be entirely correct. My difficulty is not that the point is unimportant or that the House is not concerned about it. It may be. However, it simply does not attack in a fundamental form the rights of members of the House of Commons collectively to carry out their fundamental duty as elected members.

Even if the hon. member is correct that the president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is contravening the Broadcasting Act—and I do not know whether he is or not—that is an illegality. Even if the policy is such that it becomes distasteful to the hon. member or to several hon. members, that is a matter to be taken up by way of grievance, not by way of a question of privilege.

MR. SYMES—ALLEGED MISLEADING ANSWER GIVEN BY MINISTER

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I gave you due notice of a question of privilege I wished to raise today in relation to statements made in the House by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Hnatyshyn) concerning fuel oil supplies over these winter months. I also gave notice to the energy minister that I would be raising this point this afternoon or this morning. I notice he is not in his place. However, an element arising out of the question period today also involves the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark). I see that he is in his place and I would like to proceed.

[Mr. Fleming.]

The fundamental question of privilege I have is whether or not members of the House of Commons, and hence the people of Canada, are receiving accurate information and an honest appraisal of a particular situation. I would like to contend by way of argument that the energy minister has been misleading myself, the House of Commons and the people of Canada as to the true situation concerning fuel oil supplies in Canada. Through argument I would like to develop by way of some very brief quotations over the past few weeks by the energy minister, indicating that he is saying one thing when in reality, as confirmed just a couple of days ago by the Prime Minister and today by the National Energy Board, the situation is quite different—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) is in his very own terms raising a matter of debate. If I were to give him the floor now to take issue with statements made by the energy minister or any other minister in answering questions over the last several days, whether or not different answers to the same questions may have been given, as he well knows contradictions in answers given by the same minister are the subject of comment, criticism and attack but are not the subject of a question of privilege.

I have said to the House in recent days that if I am going to permit members to rise here and take up disagreements with ministers by way of questions of privilege at the end of every question period, we will begin a whole round of explanations of the question period in which members will get up and say they asked a minister a question today, that the answer is the following, and they want to show to the House that that answer is incorrect. That surely is a subject of debate and disagreement. If there are situations in which there is an allegation that there has been an actual falsification, perhaps indeliberate or not, that is another matter. But I cannot permit the hon. member now to develop an argument that the answer he was given was inaccurate or incorrect or not of good quality. That becomes, by its very nature, a debate, and I simply could not permit the hon. member to do that, any more than I could permit hon. members every day to use a question of privilege as a vehicle for taking up disagreements with ministers.

● (1430)

Mr. Symes: Just for clarification, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether Your Honour could inform me how this House is to operate if the information given to members is misleading.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Symes: What is Your Honour's definition of a misleading answer? What I have been attempting to show is that the information I have been receiving is inaccurate and misleading, thus inhibiting me in carrying out my duties as a member of Parliament. I cannot function without accurate information and replies from the ministry.