

Privilege

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will deal very directly with the allegation made by the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster, supported by the hon. member for Sherbrooke. There was absolutely no question of a budget leak in this case.

There is no evidence that has been adduced by the hon. member to support that, absolutely no evidence.

Mr. Charest: Read the *Hill Times*.

Mr. Milliken: I have read the *Hill Times* and I know the hon. member read the *Hill Times*. The answer that was given has been fully explained in a reply, given in writing, by the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington which was read by the chief government whip a few moments ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I have listened attentively, as all members have on this issue. A question of privilege is an important matter and a serious matter for all parliamentarians. I would ask that we keep the discussion in the parliamentary fashion that we have thus far, that we might conclude this matter.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, certain hon. members of the opposition were invited to a briefing on the budget well in advance, a briefing that was not provided to government members. I had no idea what was in the budget until I walked into the House and heard the budget being delivered.

That was not the case with certain members of the opposition who were invited to a briefing. That is standard practice and there is no suggestion in the answer that was given by the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington as explained in the memorandum that she has tabled here that there was anything but that procedure followed. She has explained that the procedure she was talking about when she answered the question dealt with events long before budget day.

I refer once again to citation 31 of Beauchesne's which has already been quoted. I need not read it again. I want to remind the Chair that when we had a case of a budget leak with the hon. Michael Wilson during the last Parliament, a major leak in which the whole document got out, there was a question of privilege raised and debated for an entire day in this House on that very issue.

There was never anything referred to a committee. The Chair never made a finding that there had been a breach of the privileges of the members of this House, even though there had been a complete leak of the budget. I think the hon. member for Sherbrooke was in the cabinet at that time.

What I am saying is that there is no evidence of any leak here today in respect of the budget. If there were, according to the citation of Beauchesne's and in accordance with the practice

followed in respect of Mr. Wilson's major leak, the whole thing went out. In light of the precedent established then, I submit there is nothing that the House should do to take note of this unless the hon. member for Sherbrooke wishes to set down a motion condemning not the member for Guelph—Wellington but the Minister of Finance for allowing any information to get into her hands.

In the face of the denial, I suggest such a motion is not supported by any evidence and it would be a waste of the time of this House, as is the question raised by the hon. member.

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Sherbrooke for a final comment, but I wish to apprise the House that I would hold that comment to a minimum amount of time. The Chair does not want to restart the whole debate. I have listened attentively. It is an important, serious matter. It will be dealt with as its seriousness requires.

Mr. Charest: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your patience. I do not want to rehash past events. For the benefit of all members of the House, let us focus on what is really at issue here. I feel compelled to stress this because there is a very important distinction in the situation we are facing today relative to precedent.

The precedents referred to are on the notion of confidentiality, budget secrecy as applied at large. We are facing a new situation today in which certain members of the House of Commons were informed beforehand according to this bold admission.

Mr. Speaker, that is the evidence you have. May I point out according to precedent that is the prima facie evidence you have before you today. That is the reason I think you will find here a question of privilege.

The parliamentary secretary has hoisted himself on his own petard when he rises in this place to say there is no evidence and then goes on to explain the rebuttal of the evidence that happens to be in front of this House. To make that statement is so gross as to deny that this statement actually exists in a document that was distributed to the public at large.

This is the last point I want to make. Let me read the quotation because it goes directly to the heart of this matter. The member for Guelph—Wellington said: "I do not think so. There were some MPs who were told beforehand if major cuts were coming to programs in their ridings".

The last phrase goes to motive: "They asked for that in caucus so they could prepare to answer questions".

My colleague from the Bloc Québécois—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Order. I think the Chair has heard all the arguments from the members who participated.