

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 11, 1974

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

TABLING OF FOURTH REPORT OF CLERK OF PETITIONS

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has laid upon the table the fourth report of the Clerk of Petitions.

Mr. John Roberts (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In accordance with Standing Order 67 which says that a petition may be read if required, and citing citation 343 of Beauchesne's which says that a member clearly has the right to ask that a petition be read—and this privilege, like many others, is subject to the approval of the House—I would ask that you now request the House to give unanimous approval to the reading of this petition which is quite short.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member may be correct, in that the petition is quite short; however, I am not aware whether other hon. members have had the opportunity to examine its contents. The hon. member is correct when he suggests he has the right to ask that a petition be read. This is an unusual procedure; however, it is supported by precedent in that an hon. member presenting a petition does have the right to ask that it be read, whereupon the House may give its consent. In any event, there are other conditions precedent to that which surround the presentation of a petition, not the least of which concerns the language of the petition and any reflection it might have upon a decision taken either by this House, the government or by other bodies.

● (1410)

Personally, I have grave concern, after examining the contents of this petition, whether or not it conforms with all those conditions. Under the circumstances, I would propose to defer any decision on the hon. member's request until tomorrow at this time, in order to give hon. members an opportunity to comment or to contribute in respect of the suggestion that the petition be read, not simply because of this petition in particular but because I think the House ought to direct itself to the question of whether or not comments or commentary ought to be introduced in this chamber in this way with respect to decisions and positions which have been taken by the Canadian government.

The idea of petitioning the House of Commons to take certain action is, of course, standard practice. However, to

include in the petition comments or reflections upon positions and decisions already taken by the government is a bit of a departure. Therefore, before we begin such process or encourage it in any way, I would invite hon. members to make a contribution on the question of whether or not the Chair should have a disposition to ask for the consent of members. Therefore, I would propose to take note of the hon. member's request and make a decision on it at this time tomorrow.

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[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

MR. LA SALLE—REFERENCE TO REMARKS OF HON. MEMBER FOR TÉMISCAMINGUE

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on a question of privilege relating to statements made yesterday by the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette), on the allotted day, with reference to conflict of interest.

The hon. member for Témiscamingue made statements that suggest that every member is at fault, that his personal interests come first before those of his riding.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the text of two extracts of the hon. member's speech to justify my question of privilege. Among other things, he said:

In my opinion, not many members would vote if we made a careful scrutiny of the interests of all members of parliament because every one of them tries to find some benefits outside the House.

And a little further, he said, and I quote:

... and political party organizers do so ...

He did not say who.

Under the circumstances, and since these general allegations have been made in a way that cast reflection on all those, near or far, who are connected with politics, I would urge the Chair to ask the hon. member for Témiscamingue to clarify his statement, and even to make some charges, if need be, instead of suggesting and leading the public to believe that politics is a dirty trade, which would be most unfortunate.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: If there are no other members who wish to make a contribution in respect of the question of privilege, I would have to note that this question of privilege is not followed by a motion which would require action by the Chair but is basically in the form of a request that the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) clarify and specify the members to whom he might have been referring in the remarks complained of. Under the circumstances, that request remains on the record and may be clarified at some other time if the hon. member is so