

Privilege—Mr. Nystrom

● (1230)

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am not reflecting on the ability of those three members, but what is important here is that those three members are members of the Conservative party. In essence, what we have here is a Conservative subcommittee on grain transportation. Its report was printed at public expense. My question of privilege is that as a member of the NDP I do not have the privilege of being a member of that committee, nor do members of the Liberal party or members of the Social Credit party.

I also want to point out to you, Mr. Speaker, that I do not think, although I am not sure, that an order in council was passed to form that task force. I do know there was no order of the House because the House was not sitting back in June or July when the task force was struck. I believe it was the minister himself who chose this task force and who allocated funds for the task force to travel across the country. The report of the task force has been published by the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, so we have two government departments involved in this.

I am not the only person who has raised a question similar to this because we have the beef inquiry, we have another inquiry raised by the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil) concerning the matter of branch line abandonments in the prairies, and also a question in the House raised by the hon. member for Stormont-Dundas (Mr. Lumley) to which he might want to refer later on in the debate.

My question of privilege is as follows: Does it not infringe upon my privileges and rights as a member of Parliament not to have access to the same public funding, to the same services from the Department of Transport and from the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and to the services of the translators of the Government of Canada to translate a political report or a report from members of one political party? We do not have that right as members of Parliament, and because of that I think it is a very serious question of privilege. I believe that this is a precedent. I believe that this type of thing has never happened in the history of the country. It is a practice that should be stopped by the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark), the practice of using public funds for narrow party purposes.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, there is a second important part to this question of privilege, in my opinion. Many people have called me and said, "I understand that there is a parliamentary task force studying grain transportation in this country. Are you, as the food and agricultural critic, or is the member for Regina West as the transportation critic, a member of that task force?"

An hon. Member: How could you be?

Mr. Nystrom: That is the very point I am raising. Because public funds are being spent, we were not invited to be members of that task force, and nor were members of the

[Mr. Nystrom.]

Liberal party or members of the Social Credit party. That is a misrepresentation of this Parliament. There is an impression among the population of this country that this is a parliamentary task force report and therefore a non-partisan report prepared by representatives of all parties in this House.

My question of privilege is that public funds and services were used, the services of translators, the services of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, and the services of the Department of Transport. The report has now been tabled in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications of this House. Also we have answers on the order paper which state that over \$9,000 from the public treasury was spent. I have it from a good source, as I said, that other government services were used in terms of secretaries and technical assistance from other departments.

I think that that is an infringement upon my rights as a member. If they have those rights, should we not all have the same rights and the same access to that type of public funding? It seems to me that it would only be fair. I raise that as an important question of privilege which affects the privileges of all of us in the House. Regardless whether the Prime Minister thinks so or not, all of us in this House are equals and we must be treated as equals by the ministers of this cabinet and by all departments of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Speaker: I see several members who want to participate in the discussions of this question of privilege and I am prepared to hear them either now or later. The one that has been raised by the hon. member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell (Mr. Ethier) concerns the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise). The Minister of Agriculture has indicated he wants to respond to that on Monday. I want to indicate to the House that I have examined the one that has been raised in respect of the Minister of Agriculture and it will not be decided until I hear the minister, of course. The situation is the same with respect to this question.

I do want to say to the House, however, that if in fact public funds have been spent on a committee activity of this sort, a committee made up of only one party, it is a practice which, if it does not constitute privilege, is one which the House would want to examine very carefully and reconsider. I want to invite earnest consideration by the ministers involved—the Minister of Agriculture on the previous question and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) on this one. Whether or not technically this comes within the orbit of a question of privilege, it is a practice that ought to be carefully examined.

The reason I say this now is that I do not want to get an off-hand intervention in the absence of a notice to the minister. I would invite the government members involved, including, of course, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Baker) who is responsible for parliamentary practices, to give this matter careful consideration. If it is in fact a practice in which this government wishes to engage and wishes to defend—which, of course, is not my option, it is the option of those involved on that side of the House—then it ought to be done after careful consideration, following which an argument should be addressed to the House. If it is an issue which, after consider-