

Question of Privilege

Even if the charge is eventually disproven, there is always the chance that a bit of mud will stick. Someone in the house who shares Mr. Girouard's immunity ought to express the indignation of those members who are honourable in fact as well as by usage.

In my opinion the use of the words "honourable members" in quotation marks followed by "as they love to call themselves" is more than a slight against the hon. member for Labelle; it is a sneering imputation that members of this house are not fully entitled to such an appellation. Further, sir, the sentence "If Mr. Girouard can escape this incident without censure there will be a temptation for unscrupulous members to think that it is worth making any reckless accusation against a political enemy" contains more than a suggestion that there are unscrupulous members in this house. There is also an implied accusation that the committee on privileges and elections failed to do its duty with regard to this reference. Finally, Mr. Speaker, the phrase "the indignation of those members who are honourable in fact as well as by usage" is a clear allegation that not all members of this house are honourable.

Seldom if ever have members of parliament who conscientiously try to do their duty been subjected to such a scurrilous and unfounded attack as this writer makes upon the hon. member for Labelle. I cannot conceive that any member of this house would allow such wholesale attacks on all hon. members as these slanderous inferences constitute. I believe that newspaper editorial writers have a responsibility for at least quoting their facts accurately. They should have at least some regard for fairness. We as members of parliament must protect the position of members of this house as honourable members or fail utterly in our responsibility to those positions.

Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Rhéaume):

That this editorial be referred to the committee on privileges and elections so that the editorial writer and/or the editor of the paper responsible for this editorial may be given an opportunity to appear before that committee to explain their conduct and for the committee to report back to this house their recommendations as to what action should be taken in this regard.

I have the newspaper, and I will table it.

Mr. Speaker: Are there other hon. members who would like to give some guidance to the Chair?

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to speak on the [Mr. Nugent.]

motion for a moment. In reference to the irresponsible editor and the editorial I would just like to read from the sworn testimony on page 51 of the proceedings of the committee on privileges and elections. This is what the hon. member said—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I do not think this is the time for an extended debate. The question is, have other hon. members in this house any advice to tender to the Chair so I may reach a decision as to whether this motion is in order and should be put to the house.

Mr. Woolliams: I am speaking to the motion, Mr. Speaker. Surely it is material to the motion to point out what are the facts. The hon. member said:

I explained the facts in the house. If any of you wish to have further details with regard to the interpretation that may be given to my statement, I will be happy to supply you with them.

And this is what he said:

I am not accusing anyone of anything. I have repeated facts and words in order to clear myself of the accusation made against me.

Those words which he refers to as having been said in the house on April 27, 1964 were "the benefits of the party in power and a fat electoral fund for the next election". So I say, Mr. Speaker, that the editorial was most irresponsible, and I therefore rise in support of the motion in question.

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): Mr. Speaker, after the experience we had with this particular case before the committee on privileges and elections I think it would be most regrettable if this motion were accepted by you. I would like to point out that the report has not been concurred in, and we have an undertaking from the chairman of the committee that concurrence will be moved. This will provide an opportunity for debate; it will open up a chance for all hon. members to have their say. I thought it was a pitiful editorial and most unfair, but I do not see how this particular action can really do much about setting it right. If we wanted to, I think any member of the house could take exception on almost any day to some editorial somewhere in connection with our role as members of parliament and how we carry out our duties.

I would like to point out to you, sir, that we will have the chance for a full debate. I know the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Grégoire) and others of us who were on the committee certainly intend to take that