

Publicizing of Policy Statements

looked into the precedents and I am now in a position to indicate to the House whether I consider that there is a prima facie case of privilege, since this has to be determined before the motion can be put in a formal way to the House.

It may be useful at the beginning of the session for me to stress once again, as I have tried to do in the past sessions, the very nature of parliamentary privilege. Privilege has been defined as the sum of the fundamental rights enjoyed by each House of Parliament collectively and by members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals. In the seventeenth edition of May's Parliamentary Practice at page 43 we find the following:

When any of these rights and immunities, both of the Members, individually, and of the assembly in its collective capacity, which are known by the general name of privileges, are disregarded or attacked by any individual or authority, the offence is called a breach of privilege, and is punishable under the law of Parliament.

Parliamentary privilege as a separate part of the common law includes the following special rights and immunities available to Members of Parliament:

—freedom of speech, in the sense of immunity against suits in defamation; freedom from arrest in certain very limited circumstances; exemption from court duty as a witness or as a juror; protection against undue influence, and reflection on Members.

There are also the collective privileges of the House dealing with the control of its proceedings and publications; the calling and protection of witnesses; reflections and indignities affecting the House as a body or as an institution; the right to set up its own rules, and the traditional privileges claimed by the Speaker on behalf of the House at the opening of Parliament.

I stress the essence of the definition of privilege itself so that hon. members will realize that it is only in very extreme circumstances that there can come to the House a legitimate case of privilege on the basis of the real and accepted and traditional definition of parliamentary privilege.

The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether hon. members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such

[Mr. Speaker.]

information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion. Hon. members will remember that there was an interesting and somewhat protracted debate on a question of privilege raised in the last session by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams). The arguments which were advanced at the time were studied closely and the precedents were discussed in a ruling of the Chair reported at page 869 of *Votes and Proceedings* of March 31, 1969. The precedents which were quoted at that time are in my view applicable to the circumstances outlined by the hon. member for Hillsborough. There may be, in such circumstances, a question of propriety or a question of courtesy. There may be a grievance. But in my view there cannot be a question of privilege. In the circumstances I regret that I cannot put the hon. member's motion to the House.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

FINANCE, TRADE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE OF SUBJECT OF INTEREST RATES

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I understand there have been consultations with representatives of the other parties in order to move with unanimous consent a reference to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs. The purpose of the reference is to give the committee an opportunity to consider the present level of interest rates in Canada in relation to rates in other countries and to economic conditions in Canada and elsewhere.

With unanimous consent, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin):

That the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs be empowered to consider the present level of interest rates in Canada and their relation both to rates in other countries and to economic conditions in Canada and elsewhere;

And that the evidence adduced by the committee in its study of the aforementioned matter during the first session of the twenty-eighth parliament be referred to the committee.

Mr. Speaker: Has the minister leave to present this motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to.