

Question of Privilege

In contending that this sort of conduct should not be allowed I am not suggesting that there should be restriction put upon the freedom of the press. I would merely remind the press that they have that responsibility which anyone who exercises freedom of speech must accept.

I want to assure hon. members that when I read this article the first thing that annoyed me was the fact that an error was made in fact. First of all, I would avowedly deny any suggestion that I am being impelled by some other group. I have never been in this "Admirals' club", or whatever it is, to which reference is made. I have met Admiral Landymore but once in my life, and that was when I went to Halifax to see whether he was prepared to swear to certain matters which I thought made a case that had to be brought to the attention of this house.

I know Admiral Brock and have talked to him many times, and I believe he has talked to many members of this house who are interested in military matters, members on all sides of the house, including cabinet ministers.

I am perturbed mostly, I think, because the writer of this article is attempting to paint a picture which can do nothing but disservice. It is my contention that the questions I raised were most important ones, involving the very question of cabinet responsibility to this house and the question of the efficiency and authority of committees.

● (3:20 p.m.)

I believe these questions are so important and so involved that they should be brought to the attention of the house and resolved. I am therefore much perturbed by the suggestion in this article that there is a mysterious person, an English speaking military man who knows the situation very well and who is apparently guiding and mis-directing the press gallery as to what is going on. This perhaps accounts in part for some of the confusion of this writer. There is contained in one paragraph of this article a suggestion that when the minister challenged me to risk my seat by making a definite allegation of misconduct, a signal given from the gallery had some effect in that I did not accept any such challenge.

We need to examine exactly what occurred on that occasion. I know that exactly what took place is not clear in the mind of the writer, and there is similar confusion in the minds of other reporters. But there should be no doubt that the minister had been formally

[Mr. Nugent.]

and properly charged and it is therefore puzzling to account for any suggestion that I had failed to risk my seat by making a definite accusation of misconduct.

The minister had been formally charged in the only way in which this could be done, by my rising and taking full responsibility for my actions. It is a little puzzling to determine how there could be confusion on this point, unless that confusion arises from something said by the minister, and there have been statements attributed to the Minister of National Defence which, in fairness to the reporter, should be brought to the attention of the house. After all, when a member of the press gallery makes such serious allegations against me and I am taking the step of having him brought before the committee, if I can, I think it is only fair that we should understand what motives are behind this. I have mentioned one mysterious figure, and I think that in fairness I should point out there is some reason why the writer might have been under a misapprehension. It is because of the actions of the minister.

The first action of the minister is this: he has continued to sit in the house, though having been formally charged, without having an opportunity of clearing his name—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the co-operation of the hon. member who should limit his remarks to the point now before us. The question is that this matter be referred to the committee on privileges and elections. The hon. member should limit his remarks to this rather narrow point which is the essence of the motion before us.

Mr. Nugent: I am afraid I may have given the impression of wandering, but with all due respect I really believe the essence of the question before us is the conduct of this reporter in writing his article. I do not believe I should complain about his accusations without, in fairness, presenting all sides of the case as I understand it and without calling the attention of the house to all those factors which in my opinion add to his guilt or his innocence. In the same way as I thought it fair to protest that I have had nothing to do with any committee of admirals who are plotting in connection with this affair, and in the same way as I have expressed my belief that the writer makes an error in fact when he says I was directed from the gallery, I think it is only fair to mention that I do know Admiral Brock. If this can be interpreted in another way, it is open to the house to interpret it that way.