

Privilege

Mr. Milliken: A point of order does not take precedence over a question of privilege, Harvie. Learn the rules.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to interfere with a legitimate point of privilege.

An hon. member: Sit down.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, as I am aware and as the hon. member is aware, Mr. Stewart, upon hearing this accusation faxed a letter—

Mr. Speaker: First of all, I think I should tell the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell that probably I have the material to which he is referring. In all fairness, except for the letter I have not heard the point of privilege set out. If the hon. member is referring to a text I will continue to hear him.

I do want to say this to the hon. member. The content of the letter does not concern me because various members may have different views of this. A letter could be sent that all members would think is completely appropriate. The question is whether or not it is appropriate to send it out, or for somebody to send it out, apparently under the guise of House of Commons stationery. That is the point.

I know what the hon. House Leader is getting at. I do not think at this stage it is appropriate to bring into the discussion any reflection on the former hon. member. The point I have to decide is whether whoever put this out has done something which breaches the privileges of the House.

Mr. Boudria: Thank you for your assistance. Perhaps the Government House Leader can listen attentively and then will find out what I am saying and who I am accusing and not accusing. For anyone to come to that judgment before I speak is somewhat premature. But, of course, he wouldn't know that.

First of all, let us review the definition of privilege. As Mr. Speaker will know, parliamentary privilege according to Erskine May's twenty-first edition, page 69 is stated as being:

— the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and by Members of each House—

At issue here is whether or not there has been an offence against the House or against any member of

Parliament individually. Of course, the House itself enjoys privilege as well as individual members. I do think that this is an important point to raise at the beginning of this discussion.

It is not my intention to comment on the content of the letter in question. What I want to bring to the attention of the Speaker is the form of the letter. I have brought this to the attention of the Speaker and I do believe I have given him a copy of the letter. If not, of course, I am willing to provide a copy of the material immediately at the conclusion of my remarks.

Basically described, the material is as follows: it has a letterhead of the House of Commons and the Arms of Canada. At the top, left-hand side is an inscription which states, "Ronald A. Stewart, M.P., Simcoe South". On the right-hand side is: Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Supply and Services. Carrying on to the signature block of the letter it states: "Ron Stewart, M.P. (Ret)".

Mr. Speaker, that is perhaps the first point that we should discuss. There are a number of points and I intend to be brief. The Oxford American Dictionary, 1982 gives three meanings for ret., retain, retire or return.

The point I am making to you, Mr. Speaker, is that there is at least a difference between the signature block and the top of the letter in question. That difference is attributed by a spokesperson on behalf of the group known as English First to the fact that they themselves superimpose the House of Commons crest inscription along with the indications at the top of the letter on material already provided to them by Mr. Ronald Stewart.

I would like to draw a parallel for a moment so that all members of this House understand. If, for instance, a group in Canada, say the Alliance for the Preservation of English decided to use the Arms of the President of the United States in material that it was circulating here in Canada, I am sure that we would hear of it and I believe rightfully so, just as we are, rightfully in my opinion, raising this issue today. First there is the issue of the member of Parliament, Ret. I do not believe that it is the custom in this country, and perhaps you can verify it, as to whether or not there is a precedent for using the term Member of Parliament, Ret. After all, as I indicated in my correspondence with Mr. Speaker, the Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs does not describe