

Privilege—Mr. W. Baker

establish. We do not have to establish the fact beyond a reasonable doubt.

There is room for argument in respect of this debate. There is an area of grey here. All the motion says is that the matter of the erosion of the right of the House to approve the general budgetary policy of the government, particularly in view of the procedure followed by the minister in his presentation to the House on Monday, April 21, during the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

You know as well as I, Madam Speaker, that the whole foundation of this institution in terms of the Mother of Parliaments is the power of the purse. We also know from every auditor general's report for the last 25 years, and certainly since the Second World War, that no matter who has been in the opposition benches, we have slowly, and sometimes too fast, lost control of the purse.

I submit, in conclusion, that unless this matter can be referred to the committee for proper redefinition as a minimum, then this institution is going to lose even more respect than it has to date. I think this institution should be advancing in terms of modern technology; but when we have modern technology with archaic rules and questionable procedures, I do not think it will advance.

I can understand the minister trying to get some paper before us. Madam Speaker, if the first four pages of the statement had not been read to the House—those implementing tax changes—and if from the middle of page 4, where he started talking about the fiscal position for 1979-80 and 1980-81, to page 12 had been his speech, that, Madam Speaker, would have been the speech that you and I and other members of the House had heard previous ministers of finance give in this House—a general survey of economic conditions, a general survey of the revenue position of the government and a general survey of what the government needs in terms of taxes, but not tax changes. Statements in the House, Madam Speaker, are not tax changes. When you get tax changes you have a budget, and then members on all sides have an opportunity to debate that budget.

● (1520)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, one wonders what has been going on here today. We have heard all the rhetoric about mouseland. Sometimes I think this is mouseland. We have heard about Alice in Wonderland, we have heard the government House leader compared to a rascal, to a caterpillar and to a cod liver.

An hon. Member: Cod tongue.

Mr. Nystrom: Sometimes we might wonder what is happening to the institution of Parliament.

I just want to say one or two things, Madam Speaker. First of all, to repeat the point made by the House leader of our party, this is not so much a question of procedural argument as

a question of whether it was good political judgment or good leadership by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen). I maintain that it was not good leadership and it was not good political judgment by the Minister of Finance. That surprises me, because he is the wise old fox of Parliament. He is the architect of the Liberal party, the so-called architect of the downfall of the hon. member who is now Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark). It surprises me that the minister would make the kind of insensitive blunder that he did in a moral sense in terms of slighting Parliament.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to mention a couple of things that are very important. First of all, it is obvious that a number of us on this side of the House feel slighted. We were planning the throne speech debate and a number of members wanted to participate in it, to speak about their own region or constituency or province. All of a sudden we have a budget measure, or something that most of us think is a budget statement, that is going to take the place of a regular budget debate a few weeks ahead. Some of our members were planning to speak at that time and others wanted to participate in the debate before the House today. I say that is very important.

The last few words in the throne speech were to the effect that members of Parliament are equals, that we should reflect each part of the country, and so on. If we are to do that, we should be equals in this place; we should all be treated as equals. This should be where the decision-making process takes place. We should all be consulted and we should be apprised of what is to go on. I do not think we were in this case. I maintain it is a question of fair play between the government and the opposition.

If the government wants to be productive, it must never forget that opposition parties are important and that they can be more productive if they know the opposition parties will co-operate. The way to get opposition parties to co-operate, of course, is to get them involved, to fully consult them and make them a legitimate part of the process with a legitimate amount of input into government policy, not to bend the rules of this place in any way.

It seems to me, Madam Speaker, that this is an adult institution. We should be "up front" with everybody and should level with everybody. Much of what this debate is about is the relationship between the various political parties. That relationship must, I think, be one that is co-operative and open.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the House leader of our party did not understand from the Minister of Finance that the statement he was to make would include all the tax changes and the regular budgetary changes that he announced. We operate according to the information given by our House leader. I think that if the Minister of Finance were more open and more sensitive to the opposition—after all, we on this side of the House represent more than 50 per cent of the Canadian people—he would have handled this in a totally different way.

I just make that appeal, Madam Speaker. We have four years to go—maybe three or maybe five. I think we can have a