

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 15, 1970

The House met at 11 a.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. MACQUARRIE—MEMBERS' RIGHT TO ENTER PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege respecting the rights of all members of this House. One of the ancient and fundamental rights of a parliamentarian is surely the right of entrance to and egress from the legislative chambers wherein he deliberates as a representative of the people. There is a long tradition of parliamentary bodies successfully asserting their freedom from restraint and arrest in the discharge of their duties.

Yesterday's reported barring of members from the centre block, the locale of this chamber, by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is a most serious intrusion upon the essential freedom of movement of members of this chamber. There is surely cause for concern and, more importantly, a need for an investigation as to the circumstances surrounding this most regrettable incident affecting the privileges of all hon. members.

It was my intention to move that this matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, but I desist from this course at the present time in the hope that the proper authorities will make appropriate investigation.

An obvious question concerns the authority on which such orders were issued. More fundamental is the need for reassurance that the security of the centre block will remain the responsibility not of the state police but of the parliamentary protective staff, and that no emanation of the executive will be empowered or authorized to interfere with the members of this House in the legitimate and proper discharge of their duties in this place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Hillsborough has given me notice of his intention to raise this question. Unfortunately, I have not had an opportunity to have the matter looked into and investigated, as suggested by

the hon. member. I have received a preliminary report and that report would not appear to substantiate, at least entirely, the fears expressed by the hon. member. In any event, I will have the matter looked into.

As hon. members realize, if I may say this in passing, the difficulty we have in relation to this situation is that while the parliamentary precincts, by tradition and practice, are recognized as covering the buildings themselves and principally the centre block and west block, parliamentary precincts have never been officially deemed to include the grounds surrounding our buildings, which makes of course for a divided authority. So far as the centre block is concerned, there is no question whatever that the protective staff of the House of Commons, who are parliamentary employees, have sole and exclusive jurisdiction over protection within this building. I can assure the hon. member that as far as I am concerned there is no intention whatsoever of allowing this to be changed. At the same time, once we are out of the building we fall on grounds which are perhaps a little more directly under the control of the executive. This may have been the source of the misunderstanding to which the hon. member referred a moment ago.

● (11:10 a.m.)

In any event, without going into the matter in greater detail I assure the hon. member that a complete investigation will be carried out, and I will report to the House at the beginning of the week. I may even go a little farther than the point raised by the hon. member and launch into the field of obiter dicta and express my views about the question of parliamentary precincts.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

NATIONAL RESOURCES AND PUBLIC WORKS

Fifth report of Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works—Mr. Hopkins.

[*Editor's Note: For text of above report, see today's Votes and Proceedings.*]