

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 7, 1976

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PRIVILEGE

MR. BAKER (GRENVILLE-CARLETON)—REFERENCE TO
REMARKS OF MR. AUGUSTE CHOQUETTE

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) has given the Chair notice of a question of privilege and also advised the Chair that there seems to be some disposition in the House that the question of privilege is of such a nature that it ought to be taken forthwith.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues with respect to this matter. I regret very much that it is necessary to deal with this question on a day set aside for the discussion of pollution and its effects on native people. Therefore, I shall be very brief with respect to this matter.

Mr. Auguste Choquette is quoted as saying before an open court and I quote:

—if everyone who had ever taken or given \$600 or \$700 bribes in their life were arrested, 50 per cent of the MP's would no longer be sitting.

● (1110)

He also said:

I know it because I was an MP for five years.

Clearly, he means MP's performing as members of parliament.

The source of these remarks and the wide distribution they have been given forces our attention. An institution as venal and corrupted as Mr. Choquette asserts this parliament to be would have no right to respect from the Canadian people. If true, the remarks must be acted upon and the historical penalties exacted; if they are false, a public declaration by Mr. Choquette must be made withdrawing the slanderous accusations against half the members sitting here.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): As you know, Mr. Speaker, the remarks are almost certainly a question of privilege. Standing Order 76 and Beauchesne citations 434, 435 and 108(5) deal directly with bribery. The last citation calls the offering of a bribe "an insult not only to the member himself, but to the House"; and the acceptance of a bribe has always been "a grave offence, which has been visited by the severest punishments". On page 138 of May's 18th edition, the penalty described is imprisonment or expulsion from the House.

Acceptance of a bribe is a serious form of corruption and Beauchesne 111(h) states that "imputations against members of corruption in the execution of their duties" is a breach of privilege. Citation 110, in describing "high violations" against the House, provides:

The same rule applies to a charge against a member for conduct which renders him unworthy to sit in Parliament and to criticize the House for not expelling him.

So gross an accusation, Mr. Speaker, must surely be justified with facts, or apologized for at the bar of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): It seems to me important that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections examine Mr. Choquette and establish the facts for the sake of the reputation of parliament and all its members. I therefore move:

That the accusation that a substantial proportion of the members of the House of Commons have been in receipt of bribes be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

[Translation]

Mr. J.-J. Blais (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I eagerly support the comments of the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker). I am certain, for that matter, that all members of the House will agree with me. Mr. Speaker, like all members I was appalled at the report of Mr. Choquette's statement.

[English]

It is essential, and no one will question, that the integrity of all members of this House be protected. It is with that thought in mind that I fully support the motion made by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker).

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we are all pleased that the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) has raised this important issue at the first opportunity. I think both he and the previous speaker are to be commended for the brevity of their remarks. It seems to me that the case is so clear that it does not need extensive debate. I hope that Your Honour will find there is a prima facie case of privilege and that the motion made by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton will therefore be ruled in order.

We all feel that when someone like our former colleague, Mr. Auguste Choquette, makes a statement of this kind, especially when he makes it in open court, he should be called upon to answer for it, to substantiate it or to withdraw the serious charges he has made. I hope that very shortly this matter will be before the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I should like to echo something the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) said the