

Privilege—Mr. Milliken

With great respect, we have heard today several members of the Opposition stand and seek to represent the rights of their constituents by asserting the ancient privileges of this House. It is fine to talk about parliamentary privilege. Maybe it means nothing to a lot of people in Canada who hear the expression and think that it is not important. It is important because those privileges are in fact the representation of the privileges of the people. It is those people that all 295 of us are here to represent.

I recognize, and I think all Hon. Members recognize it, that the persons who occupy positions in Cabinet have an additional or slightly different responsibility. I can understand. Members of Cabinet, when they are caught with their pants down as they were last night, lost the biggest thing they could have lost, namely, the Budget. It went out the window, disappeared on the streets and was published in the newspaper. I can understand their embarrassment, their unease and their desire to get that clammed up and to shore up their position. They ran to the media and got the thing public, even though it had been public for many hours already, in an effort to diffuse the criticism to which they knew they would be subjected.

I can understand that. What I cannot understand is why we have not heard from any of the Members who sit behind government Members on that side of the House. I would have thought the Hon. Member for Macleod (Mr. Hughes), who is a vociferous defender of the rights of the individual, or the Hon. Member for Winnipeg South (Mrs. Dobbie), or the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. Reid), although he is not here at the moment, or even the Hon. Member for Calgary Northeast (Mr. Kindy), might have been up on their feet defending the ancient rights of their constituents who are represented by them in this House. They are to deal with the financial affairs of this country in an orderly way, not on the airwaves, not in press releases, not by handing the stuff around at midnight.

Mr. McDermid: Why would you not agree to us sitting last night?

Mr. Milliken: Because I have been through that. If the Hon. Member had been here, he would know the answer to that question. I have just given the answer. I think those Members should get on their feet and stand up for the rights of their constituents. The rights of this Parliament are being steamrolled by the procedure being adopted by the Government opposite on this issue and

on every other financial issue that it has had to deal with in this Parliament.

Considering your ruling on this point, Sir, I invite you—

Mr. McDermid: Nobody is listening to you.

Mr. Milliken: You obviously are.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, heard!

Mr. Milliken: I suggest the Hon. Minister keep doing so. It is doing some good.

As I was saying, in considering your ruling on this very important question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I invite you to have regard to the rights not just of us as Members, which is of course your principal duty, but to bear in mind the rights of the people whom we as Members of Parliament are charged with representing in this House and the rights of Canadians to avoid taxation without representation and to avoid being taxed without that tax having been approved in this House by their duly elected representatives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, after listening to the Hon. Member,

An Hon. Member: That is two of you.

Mr. Andre: I can see that his potential clients should be grateful that he is back here.

I wonder about the question of duties and responsibilities and wonder if the Hon. Member and his colleagues ever considered what might be the national interest in all this.

There is no Standing Order to deal with the theft of a budget document. What is required when something like that happens is for there to be co-operation between members on both sides of the aisle, in recognition that hopefully we both have the national interest in mind.

What the Government House Leader attempted to do yesterday was to achieve the co-operation of the Opposition in presenting to the public the budget documents as quickly as possible, given the theft that occurred. The opposition Parties said "No, no". The national interest which might have been served in that way was not something that they were interested in pursuing but rather it is potential partisan advantage. I think the last laugh may in fact end up on our side. Quite frankly if Hon. Members opposite have been talking to their constituents today, they will see that Canadians in overwhelming majority are backing the Minister of Finance.