

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 25, 1987

The House met at 11 a.m.

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Prayers

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[English]

## PRIVILEGE

### AVAILABILITY OF BILL BEFORE INTRODUCTION IN HOUSE

**Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise a question of privilege of which I gave you notice earlier this morning.

I was surprised this morning when listening to the CBC Radio-News to learn that three Members of Parliament, the Member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead (Mr. Gérin), the Member for Richelieu (Mr. Plamondon), and the Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin) had received and made comment on a Bill not yet tabled in the House and therefore not available to all Members of Parliament for similar comment. I refer to a Bill to amend the Official Languages Act.

I would like from you clarification on this practice. It is my recollection that it is against the rules and customs of the House for the Government to make available to one group of Members a Bill for comment that is not made available to others. I think that requires some clarification and direction on your part.

I can understand the Government discussing the principles of a Bill that it will table with some Members of Parliament, including its own caucus, but not giving those Members the final Bill for comment publicly. I can also understand the Government providing Bills and documents to the official critics in the Opposition, but again under the obligation that they shall not make those Bills or proposals public, and not comment on them until the Bill has been tabled in the House.

In this case, the Member for Charlevoix said that according to the Bill Anglo-Quebecers would have no reason to worry. Perhaps he is right, but I, as a Member representing a Quebec riding with a majority of Anglophones, have no way of responding or commenting on his comments.

I would appreciate your clarification on this rule and custom of the House. If you feel that I have a *prima facie* case of privilege I will move that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedures.

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could be permitted to comment on the question of privilege raised by my hon. friend, the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand). I simply want to assure the Hon. Member, the Speaker, and the House, that no Member, with the exception that I will explain, received a copy of the Bill.

Indeed, the printing of the Bill was only completed last night, and I only now received the Bill which is to be tabled in the House of Commons. It is true that I have given copies of the legislation to the Hon. Member's colleague, the Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), the critic for the Official Opposition, and to the critic of the New Democratic Party, the Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp). I also had breakfast with them to discuss the provisions of the Bill.

I have discussed with members of my caucus the general principles of the legislation which, as indicated by the Hon. Member, is the usual case with caucus members in order to obtain their guidance and direction concerning the ultimate provisions.

There has been no breach of the long established tradition of having copies of any legislation that is to be tabled delivered to any Member, except for the exception that there has been a lock-up in this case. There have been interest groups, as well as the Commissioner of Official Languages, who have been briefed this morning and provided with a copy of the Bill, with the usual embargo.

There was one final courtesy that I thought I would extend and which would not breach the traditions of the House. Due to their particular interest in this area, this morning at ten o'clock I delivered copies of the Bill with a covering letter of an embargo to the chairpersons of the Standing Joint Committee Official Languages. I hope that will explain the matter satisfactorily to the Hon. Member.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Chair wants to ensure there are no other Members wishing to rise on the question of privilege. The Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) wishes to comment.

**Mr. Allmand:** Mr. Speaker, if the situation is as described by the Hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn), I accept that. However, I think the rules should be clarified because it appeared from the very specific comments made by the three Members to whom I referred that they had very explicit knowledge of what was in the Bill. As I say, one can understand discussing the principles of a Bill with one's caucus, and