

PRIVILEGE

MEMBER FOR TIMISKAMING—SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr. Speaker: After having co-operated with the Chair and twice postponing his question of privilege, the hon. member for Timiskaming rose on Tuesday, December 3, 1991, to protest certain comments made in the House by the hon. member for Sudbury in an exchange which took place during Question Period on Thursday, November 28, 1991.

On that date, the hon. member for Sudbury asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works a question concerning the termination of a contract for the construction of a veterans affairs building in Kirkland Lake.

The parliamentary secretary responded, and then in a supplementary the hon. member for Sudbury put the question:

I want to know the real reason behind this nonsense. Is it because the owner of the second site and the member for Timiskaming just happen to be brothers-in-law?

That was denied by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works.

The *Debates* show that someone then shouted out: "It sure helped the brother-in-law" and another hon. member said: "All in the family".

[*Translation*]

As I explained to the House on Tuesday last, I am concerned not only with the question raised by the hon. member for Sudbury but also with the mood that was created by that question. The Chair has to decide whether that question and those comments are merely out of order or whether they constitute a question of privilege.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Timiskaming was given quite a full opportunity on Tuesday last to respond to what he termed "allegations which have caused damage to myself, my family and the riding of Timiskaming".

The hon. member for Sudbury, for her part, has stated in response to the member for Timiskaming, and this is important, and I quote: "I do not for one minute infer any wrongdoing on the part of the hon. member, absolutely none".

Our jurisprudence is fairly clear in this regard. There has been no direct charge against the hon. member for

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Timiskaming raised by the hon. member for Sudbury and any inference to this effect has been categorically denied by the hon. member for Sudbury.

On the narrow issue then of whether a question of privilege can be found on this basis, the Chair cannot decide in the affirmative.

[*Translation*]

There is, however, a more troubling aspect to this whole matter. It lingers and has a suffocating effect on fair exchange in this place. That is that once certain words are uttered, it is very difficult to retract them. The hon. member for Timiskaming referred in his comments the other day to the hurt that the remarks made in the Chamber had caused him, his family and his constituents and he pleaded that in fairness: "We should once and for all be able to clear such allegations and not allow them to happen".

[*English*]

In coming to a decision on this question of privilege, the Chair is somewhat consoled by the fact that an opportunity to clear the issue has taken place. Prevention is more difficult to address. When certain words are uttered in this place, they receive wide and instant dissemination. Quite frankly, they leave an impression. The words may later be retracted, the inferences or offence the occasion caused may be withdrawn, denied, explained away, or apologized for. However, the impression is not always as easily erased.

The Chair has on numerous occasions in the past urged hon. members to respect the conventions and traditions of this place and to conduct themselves with the civility becoming representatives of their constituents. That type of civilized conduct should encompass not only interventions in debate but also questioning, statements and even those types of comments usually attributed in the official *Debates* to: "some hon. members".

[*Translation*]

The Chair wishes to emphasize that a major element of this civilized conduct consist in refraining from personal attacks. There is good reason for this. First of all, in a general sense, respect for the person is the building block upon which our society is structured. Second, few things can more embitter the mood of the House than a series of personal attacks, for in their wake they leave a residue of animosity and unease.