

Privilege

It was not as we have just identified:

—the Minister may be attacked through a substantive motion, but not through a question of privilege.

• (1215)

That was ruled that way on April 19, 1983.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to your attention the following decision made on November 18, 1981 by the then Speaker, the late Madam Sauvé: "Certainly the matter of budget secrecy is not dealt with through questions of privilege and there are very important precedents which I will recall to hon. members". She then cited a whole number of cases where it has been ruled not to be an issue of privilege.

In summary, there has not been a case of breach of budget secrecy and there is not a question of privilege now before the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred to speak before one of the government members replied, who would then have been able to respond to my comments as well.

Like the hon. member for Sherbrooke, I wanted to quote what was said by the Prime Minister when he was in the opposition, on a similar question concerning a budget leak. I will not repeat the same quote, but I would like to quote what was said by the hon. member for Saint-Maurice in *Hansard* of July 24, 1975: "The tradition of secrecy ensures that all Canadians will be kept at the same advantage or disadvantage with respect to any budgetary matter and that any announcement will be made first in this House and not privately to those who rightfully have no access and should have no access to that information".

When, as the hon. member for Sherbrooke pointed out, we look at what was said by the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington, the members of the Liberal caucus must have known how the budget would affect their respective ridings before it was brought down.

I do not think a member of Parliament should have advance knowledge, before Parliament and members of this House, of the consequences of budget cuts for his or her own riding. This raises a number of questions for me, as a parliamentarian, and my constituents will have a few as well.

If it is true that the Liberal caucus had advance knowledge of this budget, there must be Liberals who obtained some personal or political gain from that knowledge. They were able to prepare answers for their constituents before anyone else, and that is a personal gain.

Furthermore, what assurances does Parliament have that the minister did not, following his presentation of the budget to the Liberal caucus, change parts of his budget in response to undue pressure from members of his party? How can we be sure? We cannot.

I do not, and the official opposition does not think the hon. member's response to the comments by the hon. member for Shefford was satisfactory. Mr. Speaker, correct me if I am wrong, but in the past, when there were leaks or alleged leaks, the matter was usually referred to a committee of the House for clarification.

Considering that the hon. member's reply fails to satisfy members on this side of the House, I would like the Chair to take the matter under advisement and refer it to a committee, for thorough clarification of an issue that goes to the very core of the Canadian parliamentary system. It is the government, through such practices, that is making trouble in this Parliament.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Sherbrooke for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. It certainly is a very serious concern in light of citation 31 of *Beauchesne's*:

Budget secrecy is a political convention and if breached, the minister may be attacked through a substantive motion, but not through a question of privilege.

Certainly this is a very serious matter.

• (1220)

Representing the Reform Party in this House we ask questions of a general nature regarding rumours around the budget and we are told that the specifics or even generalities could not be dealt with in this House until the budget was tabled.

It comes as some shock to me to find out that one caucus in this House was made privy to the details of the budget. According to this article in the paper, the question is whether there is too much secrecy surrounding the budget, not the documents that the hon. government whip was talking about. This is a very serious matter.

Never at any time was our caucus approached by the departmental officials of finance or the minister on whether we would want a briefing on details that would affect even our individual ridings.

Were I as a member of Parliament to have known that there would be a Crow buyout in the budget prior to its tabling, I could have communicated to people back in my riding of this matter. It affects the value of land. It affects the transactions between farmers who may have been actually selling their land at that time. It is a very serious matter with millions of dollars at stake.

I am rather shocked and I want to assure this House that my caucus was not made privy to any of the details of the budget in any manner, particularly as it related to situations of cuts that would affect our riding.

I add my concern and ask the Chair to deal in a very severe way with this important matter.