

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 26, 1970

The House met at 2 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. DOUGLAS (NANAIMO-COWICHAN-THE ISLANDS)—STATEMENTS ON WATER RESOURCES BY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF ENERGY, MINES AND RESOURCES

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege which affects the rights and privileges of all members of this House. On Tuesday last, February 24, as recorded at page 4008 of *Hansard*, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said:

I reaffirm in the strongest possible terms that no water could be sold to the United States without the approval of the government of Canada. No contemplation of such approval is under consideration by the government.

At almost the same time the Prime Minister made a statement on the question of water export to the United States, as reported in the *Toronto Star* of February 25 under the byline of Mr. Gerald McDuff. The dateline is Ottawa. It reads in part:

Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau indicated last night he would be willing to consider selling some of Canada's oil, gas and water resources if studies show they are surplus to Canadian needs.

It is also stated in the article:

Trudeau told the students there is a "danger of being too possessive" about natural resources.

It goes on to say:

Trudeau said it's obvious that Canada can't use all of its pure water.

Then, one other quotation from this report:

Trudeau said the government has a good estimate of oil reserves but only a slight idea of its water resources. The government is studying Canada's water potential, he said.

"I don't want to be a dog in the manger about this. But if people are not going to use it, can't we sell it for good hard cash?"

Here we have two statements, one by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in the House in which he said there will be no export of water without the approval of the government and that the government has no intention of giving such approval, and the other by the Prime Minister, who stated at

the same time outside the House that we have more pure water than we can possibly use and that we should be prepared to sell the surplus water for hard cash. I submit, Mr. Speaker, this is contempt of Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Either the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was misleading the House in what he said last Tuesday or the Prime Minister was seeking to mislead the people of Canada when he said we have surplus water and should be prepared to sell it. I do not believe the House should allow itself to be treated with such disdain.

• (2:10 p.m.)

If Your Honour finds that there is a prima facie case of privilege, I am prepared to move a motion that these conflicting statements regarding the export of water be referred to the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works so that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources can appear and outline what is the definitive water policy for Canada.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has given the Chair notice of the question he proposed to raise at this time. I can assure him I have given the matter very serious thought in the meantime. It is always difficult to determine whether there is a question of privilege based on the precedents and practices of the House of Commons. The hon. member knows, as do all hon. members, that it is only in extreme cases that the Chair can rule that there is a prima facie case of privilege in that the privileges of an hon. member or of the House in general have been offended.

The circumstances to which the hon. member refers should, in my view, be interpreted as possibly a source of debate between two members of the government or perhaps between the government and the opposition. Personally, I doubt very much that the hon. member's grievance can be brought forth for consideration and for debate by way of a specific reference to the committee to which the hon. member referred in his statement. I think there might be other ways in which the