

[English]

PRIVILEGE

MR. RAE—ACCESS TO INFORMATION RESPECTING PUBLIC FUNDS

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I gave Your Honour notice this morning about the matter, which is related to one on which you have ruled, but, since you did not specifically rule on the submission I intend to make with respect to the householder sent out by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans), I want to raise it with you and ask you to consider it.

I have in my hand a copy of the parliamentary householder going out under the name of the hon. member for Ottawa Centre. On the inside of the cover page there is a picture of the hon. member. It says, "John Evans presenting a government multiculturalism grant."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rae: My first conclusion from that was that the minister politically responsible for the riding of Ottawa Centre was clearly falling down on the job since in my riding it is the minister responsible for Broadview-Greenwood who does the handing out of cheques and not the individual member of Parliament. My first conclusion was that clearly there is a minister who is not doing his job in Ottawa Centre. I think it should be drawn to the attention of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) that some of his ministers are not living up to their political responsibilities.

I want to raise this question in all seriousness in the context of a decision which was referred to Your Honour, but to which I have not seen Your Honour refer, and that is the decision of Mr. Speaker Jerome given on December 10, 1979, as recorded at page 2180 and 2181 of *Hansard*, with respect to a related question.

Mr. Stollery: He was fired a week later.

Mr. Rae: The hon. member for Spadina (Mr. Stollery) says he was fired a week later. I think that shows the respect for occupants of the Chair held by members of the Liberal Party.

I simply want to refer to that judgment and the problem in that case and relate it to the problem in this case. I remind Your Honour that the problem in that case was that the government of the day had established a series of committees which were House committees but which were composed entirely of members of the governing party. Members of the opposition were denied access. Those committees were partially paid for out of public funds.

I want to refer Your Honour to some things Mr. Speaker Jerome said. He said that while he would not rule on the actual question of privilege, he did want to refer to the practice which was involved. He referred specifically to the practice. He said:

I refer to the practice of supporting from public funds a committee composed of members of any one caucus.

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Then he went on to say:

The support of public funds, where applied to parliamentary activities, ought, I think, to apply across the floor of Parliament, particularly so since—

Then he went on to say something else, but the critical point was that the support of public funds, where applied to parliamentary activities, ought to apply across the floor of Parliament.

Furthermore, on page 2181 Mr. Speaker Jerome is reported to have said, and I quote:

—in my opinion the greater wisdom would be to ensure that in every case where this is done, where public funds are used to support such a committee even if it is an informal committee, such a committee consist of members of more than one party in the House. I think that is a wise practice to follow.

It seems to me that by analogy something is happening here which reflects on my ability as a Member of Parliament to have access to information with respect to public funds, that members of the governing party have a privilege and a right which is denied to me as a member of an opposition party, that members of the government party are being publicly funded, that the publicity for these activities is being publicly funded and that the publicity for these activities is directly related to householders sent out under the guise of being non-partisan publications which are supposed to provide information. All Members of Parliament distribute them, and yet the kind of publicity that is granted to hon. members opposite is not granted to members of the opposition parties.

I want to make quite clear why I resent that implication and also why I think you, Madam Speaker, have an obligation to provide protection to members of the opposition when they find themselves in this position. I think Your Honour has an obligation, if not to comment on whether a question of privilege is involved, to follow the ruling of Mr. Speaker Jerome and at least comment on the wisdom of a practice whereby members of the governing party are given a right and a privilege with respect to public funds and parliamentary publications which is not granted to any member of the opposition.

Mr. Nielsen: Denied.

Mr. Rae: Not only has it not been granted but, the last time he was involved in this House with this question of privilege, the Prime Minister explicitly said he allowed that kind of thing to go on. He says it is a practice which he regards as a good practice. The Prime Minister gave two reasons for saying it was a good practice. He said it was a good practice because it was important that the presence of the federal government be known when grants are being handed out.

I want to put clearly on the record why I reject and resent that argument as much as I reject and resent anything I have heard about this since I have become a Member of Parliament. That argument implies that to be a good federalist one has to be a Liberal. That is something which goes to the very heart of this country. There are no second-class Canadians in this House of Commons, there are no second-class patriots in this House of Commons and there are no second-class federalists in this House of Commons. I think a remark like that by the Prime Minister goes to the very core of what it means to be a