

Privilege—Mr. Goyer

Prince Albert, realizing that the situation was going so badly and that the minister was doing so well, said, "Let's stop this. Let's go to a standing committee."

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: That's right.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Come on, Allan.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: We have just begun the battle.

Mr. MacEachen: Obviously, he had no questions to ask the minister. None occurred to him, so in order to put it off for some days he said, "Let's send it to a standing committee."

I find it extraordinary, this development having taken place, that it should be urged that the Minister of Supply and Services, having risen on a question of privilege to clear his name, to defend himself, should then be asked to grant a motion to send his conduct to a parliamentary committee for investigation. If that is the case—when I say this, I do not infer for a moment that the hon. member was not fully entitled to clear his name—but when a member gets up in the House in reply to some charge to clear his name and give an explanation, is he then obliged to send his conduct to a committee for examination? If so, why did the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) not feel obliged to do it? Why did the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta (Mr. Reynolds) not feel obliged to do it?

An hon. Member: They are going to court.

Mr. MacEachen: They took the honourable course and explained themselves. Their explanation was accepted, certainly on this side of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Their explanation was accepted, their word was accepted, but if any hon. member on this side of the House had not accepted the word of the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe there was a course open to him. Clearly, he could have risen and said, "I do not accept what the hon. member has said. I think he has been guilty and the smear is justified." An hon. member could have done that and, of course, Mr. Speaker would then find a question of privilege because the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe would have been charged with misconduct by a member on this side of the House.

That is the situation we find ourselves in today. Hon. members have heard the minister; they heard him answer the questions. It is open to them to rise on privilege, to make a motion and to define the charge. That is open to them.

An hon. Member: No.

Mr. MacEachen: They can do it tomorrow. Any hon. member can do it tomorrow. Mr. Speaker Michener laid out [Mr. MacEachen.]

the ground rules. If hon. members opposite do not want to do the library work on that, I will send the reference to the right hon. gentleman opposite and then he is free to make the charge. But as Mr. Speaker Michener said, no hon. member can be investigated by a motion of this House unless there is a charge and an accusation.

The Minister of Supply and Services is confident of his position. He is confident of the truth of what he says. He is not relying on any rule when he says, "I am prepared to put my seat on the line in support of my statement." If a parliamentary committee investigated his conduct and found that he had told a lie, then he would forfeit his seat. Is any hon. gentleman on the other side ready to take the same responsibility?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I shall call on the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker), and then the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates).

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, one would think we had the period 1972 to 1974 all over again. We have heard the master of persuasive, synthetic argument at it again. The government House leader will note the reference, I am sure. If the matter we are dealing with were simply of procedural concern, then the kind of rhetorical response that the minister, with his rhetorical statement, has generated would be appropriate. He always manages to shift a matter of substance, by clever argument, to one of procedure and leave the House with the impression that that is what the issue is all about.

Let me say, at the outset, that I agree with the substance of the government House leader's response. I, for one, appreciated the fact that the Minister of Supply and Services came into the House, submitted himself in the normal course to a question of privilege, went beyond that and subjected himself to questions.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: That is why I disagree with the suggestion put forward by the official opposition. I think what the government House leader has said about the way of dealing with the question of privilege is appropriate, and the minister has dealt with that. That is not to conclude, however, as the government House leader implied in his statement, that somehow when the minister got to his feet he did so well with his explanation that the whole world was persuaded of the legitimacy of his case. The fact is quite to the contrary. Certain questions have been raised, following what the minister said, about the appropriateness of his actions as minister and whether he fulfilled his obligations. Indeed, the question of the accuracy of his memory has been raised.

● (1610)

If I may refer back to the earlier question of privilege, the minister suggested that the newspaper article I was quoting