

the Canadian economy of maintaining a full-line manufacturer of farm equipment.

Appended to that press release was a "Background" running for two pages and setting out the situation with respect to Massey-Ferguson. I will not read it into the record, but I emphasize once again we were told at twelve noon on Friday that this matter was under active review, only to find a notice was posted in the Press Gallery at 2.15 that afternoon that a press conference had been called, at which time the press release to which I have referred was distributed.

Subsequently I found out that Massey-Ferguson officials came to Ottawa on Tuesday, February 3. They met on repeated occasions with officials of various departments in Ottawa, including officials of the minister's department. I say these things in the urgent desire of satisfying Your Honour there is a prima facie case that this House has been misled, perhaps deliberately misled. Most importantly, I would point out that on Thursday, February 5, cabinet met and agreed in principle to the Massey-Ferguson support program. At that meeting it was decided to mandate four ministers to continue to overview the matter. Those ministers were the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston), the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) and the Minister of State for Economic Development, Senator Olson. I am informed that those four ministers—and this will be shown if a committee reference is approved by the House—met later that day. They met in the evening, and again they met in the early morning of Friday, February 6, at a meeting called for 7 a.m.

In the meantime, departmental officials met three times during Thursday with representatives of Massey-Ferguson, including a late night meeting which ran from 10 p.m., Thursday to 1.30 a.m., Friday. During this latter meeting a press release in the form I have read into the record was discussed, reviewed, finalized and agreed to. I emphasize again that the press release I have read into the record was finalized approximately 12 hours before we were told in the House that matter was still under active review and was under consideration.

Massey-Ferguson officials returned to Toronto early Friday morning, confident that they had an agreement. Again I emphasize, at the time Massey-Ferguson officials returned to Toronto, confident that they had an agreement, we were told in the House that the matter was still "under active review."

On Friday, between 1 p.m. and 1.15 p.m., the senior assistant deputy minister in the department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Mr. W. R. Teschke, notified Massey-Ferguson representatives by telephone in Toronto that the department intended to go ahead with an announcement, including the press conference to which I have referred, at 3 p.m. that day. As I have indicated, they subsequently posted a notice in the parliamentary Press Gallery at 2.15 p.m. advising that the press conference was scheduled.

In the context of what I have referred to, I believe the minister has misled the House by stating, first, that the Massey-Ferguson situation "is under active review", and then by stating that he could deal with my supplementary question

*Privilege—Mr. Stevens*

"when we are in a position to announce the results of the considerations we are undertaking at this time."

The minister made those statements, notwithstanding the fact the cabinet meeting held on Thursday, February 5, decided to go ahead with the Massey-Ferguson deal, that a committee of four ministers were asked to expedite the matter, that a press release was prepared covering the matter at least 12 hours earlier. In short, the minister has clearly misled the House in that, the decision having been made, he chose not to inform the House of the government's decision, stating that it was still "under active review." The minister may have taken this course for one of three reasons. The first is that he actually did not know what was going on in his department, which presumably is not so, as we have been given to understand he attended the cabinet meeting and the meetings of the "gang of four", if you like. In the first instance, I am indicating that the minister may tell us that he did not know this press release had been prepared, and if it had been prepared no final decision was made, notwithstanding the fact that the Massey-Ferguson people thought they had a deal. In fact, a press release had been approved, as had the deal been approved, by the cabinet.

● (1530)

Second, it may be that the minister knew what was happening but he thought he would take a chance on not being frank in the House. I hope that is not the case. If we get into a scenario where questions are asked in the House and ministers feel free to be less than frank, or feel free to mislead the House, we are clearly being impeded in our duties as members of this House and there is a contempt of the House. I suggest that, at least, a prima facie case on this has already been outlined, as I have indicated.

The third possibility is that the minister wanted to keep the matter kind of loose, if you like. He wanted to fudge the question so that he could skate by question period. If that is the case, if he was almost deliberately looking for an excuse to be able to say that the matter was not finally settled, I think he was less than frank. He misled the House on Friday because, clearly, the matter was settled.

The question whether the minister misled the House deliberately or not is, of course, one which I suggest should be dealt with finally by the committee, as I understand the existing precedents. If I may, I intend to refer to some of those precedents. As I understand them, I need only show that there is a prima facie case. If I show that, then the usual course is to have a motion put before the House and dealt with by the House. I will be proposing my motion later.

First, I would like to touch on the question of misleading the House and the contempt which is generally found as a result of misleading the House. I refer Your Honour to page 1856 of *Hansard* for December 6, 1978, when the then Speaker, after referring to circumstances put on the record by my colleague from Northumberland-Durham stated:

Does that lead us to the conclusion that, by virtue of an act or omission, the House, or a member, has directly or indirectly been impeded in the performance