

Privilege

respect to what, when it comes to an advertisement, would constitute a contempt of this House.

• (1230)

I want to deal with one other point. The Minister of Justice attempted to enumerate what constitutes the privileges of this House. He said, "Well, nobody has suggested yet that anything involving this advertisement affects one of these enumerated privileges".

We are dealing with something more serious and more profound than what is ordinarily considered under the heading of privilege. We are dealing with the matter of contempt, contempt of this House. It is true that when one asks the Speaker to deal with the issue of a contempt of this House it is raised through the vehicle of a question of privilege, but contempt is not exactly the same thing as the privileges of this House. It is something that goes further. It is more profound. It is more substantial. To quote Madam Speaker Sauvé in her ruling of October 29 she said:

I can assure all hon. members that the dimension of contempt of Parliament is such that the House will not be constrained in finding a breach of privileges of members or of the House.

This is precisely for the reason that, while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, that it is totally irrelevant for the Minister of Justice to enumerate what has commonly been defined as being among the privileges of this House because we are dealing with something, as I have said, more broad, more profound, and which is not required to fit into existing definitions of privilege that is the matter of the contempt of this House.

Therefore, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that while on the one hand what we are talking about here—this abomination of an advertisement that appeared in newspapers across Canada last August—falls within what Madam Speaker Sauvé has said would constitute a contempt of this House, it is also open to you—and I invite you to do so—to look at this advertisement and the arguments made about what is wrong with it and find that it is a contempt of this House because it is within your power to define, in terms of new situations and new circumstances, what constitutes a contempt.

I stress, Mr. Speaker, that if you would prefer to deal with this on the basis of precedent in terms of previous rulings, then you have that opportunity clearly in terms of the language of Madam Speaker Sauvé. What we have here in this advertisement is something which is false on its face in terms of what purports to be a report of the proceedings of the House of Commons or representation of what members have done. I repeat, the only way that the statement on the face of this ad, which reads: "On January 1, 1991, Canada's federal sales tax system will change, please save this notice"—it explains the changes and the reasons for them—the only way it could have meaning is if it is intended to convey the idea that this House has acted in a way which would make the changes in the ad possible, and we know this has not happened. Therefore I predict that if this government has the interests of this country at heart and listens to the Liberals and to the New Democrats, but above all listens to the people of Canada, these changes will not take place and in fact they must not take place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I may be able to assist members by indicating that I have been listening very closely. As the members will notice, I have been taking notes. I think I have the arguments. The Hon. Member for Kamloops is rising. I will hear him briefly.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I do have some brief comments to make, to add to points already put forward by members of the opposition and the hon. member from Oshawa.

I want to begin by suggesting that what we see before us when we refer to the advertisement that is being discussed here today, is something that I think we must also recognize as being libellous and defamatory against the House of Commons and against the members of the House.

When a government department does not accept a decision made by Parliament, the ultimate form, if you like, in our decision-making, the question is: Does it have a right, then, at the urging of their minister, to use taxpayers' money to challenge the decision of Parliament? I will use an example. If the Minister of Justice did not support or would not accept the decision made by the House of Commons on the decision of reproductive technology, would he feel it appropriate, then, to use taxpayers' money in his department to take out full page