

Privilege—Mr. Yewchuk

the appointment of a new minister of consumer affairs in the near future?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, the acting minister is one of the more vigorous members of this administration, and nothing which is in his hands can be described as being in limbo. He is a very active proponent of the principles embodied in that legislation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the government House leader whether he will include Bill C-81 in the bills to be dealt with before Easter, so that we can amend the legislation and make the freeze on our incomes complete?

Mr. Sharp: There would remain on the schedule which I have announced two days on which business has not been allocated. This is one of the possibilities. I trust we will have the wholehearted support of the hon. gentleman for the proposed law.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. YEWCHUK—POSITION OF MEDICAL DOCTORS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SITTING ON HEALTH COMMITTEE

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Athabasca on a question of privilege.

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): I was always under the impression, Mr. Speaker, that a question of privilege superseded a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member will realize that every Thursday it is the practice of the House to clarify the business to be undertaken. The hon. member will understand that this is a general question which is of interest to everyone in the House and that it ought to take precedence in certain circumstances.

Mr. Yewchuk: My question of privilege deals with the position of members of parliament who are medical doctors, and their right to sit on the health committee and examine any and all witnesses who come before the committee in a manner in keeping with their own judgment, free of any fear that their motives will be questioned by other members of parliament, by the press or by anyone else.

On March 25, representatives of the Canadian Medical Association appeared before the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs concerning the subject matter of Bill C-68. During that meeting, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) clearly attempted to impute motives to certain Conservative members of parliament by implying that they had a particular pecuniary self-interest to protect, thereby attempting to undermine their credibility as members of parliament and prejudice their right to speak freely in accordance with their conscience before the standing committee. The offending comments are reported on page 20 of issue No. 44 of the committee proceedings as follows:

[Mr. Hnatyshyn.]

It is remarkable from the other side how doctors do stick together. They praise this brief and I would like to say even over a dead body, but I say they are certainly getting together on a dead issue.

Even more offensive is the following comment, also by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway:

It is better that some people who get the service and who are paying for the service started asking a few questions and I am asking them on behalf of my constituents who seek the medical service and who are paying for it.

Clearly, in the second quotation, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway is implying that she is suited to ask questions on behalf of her constituents, but that members of the official opposition who are MPs and physicians are not—that these members put a professional interest before their public duty. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I ceased active practice four years ago. I asked the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway to withdraw her comments which I felt were undermining my credibility as a member of parliament trying to do his job. She replied as follows:

● (1510)

My indication is that you were giving evidence as though you were witnesses over there.

In short, she refused to withdraw her comment. In regard to the CTV network and their employee, Eric Malling, he stated the following day, March 26, on the "Canada AM" program at 8.20 a.m.:

The Conservative representation on the committee consisted of four doctors and a more shameless defence of the witnesses I have never seen. The way these doctors stick together you would think they had a sponge in a stiff—the entire lot of them.

Mr. Speaker, there is only one way, in my view, that that comment could be interpreted, and this is that doctor MPs on the Conservative side were not acting in the best interests of the public of Canada, but by sticking together were acting in their own self-interest or the interest of their former profession.

In committee, the chairman, on the question of privilege raised by myself that the member for Vancouver-Kingsway should withdraw her allegations, ruled, in effect, that there was no prejudice. The comment by Mr. Malling occurred, of course, outside parliament and has not been dealt with in any way to date. What is required here, Mr. Speaker, is reaffirmation that doctor MPs are entitled to the same rights and privileges as all other MPs—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yewchuk:—regardless of their employment before they came to parliament as representatives of the people of Canada, as well as corrective action by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway and Mr. Malling of the CTV network.

There are many examples of members of parliament sitting on committees related to their original employment—for example, farmer MPs speaking out vigorously on behalf of the rights and needs of Canada's farmers—without being placed under suspicion by other MPs for so doing. Members of Parliament who may have an interest in the fishing industry speak out on behalf of the fishing industry; indeed, any MP can speak of income tax laws, vote against income tax increases, and so on, and not be placed under the suspicion that he or she is acting in their