

### PRIVILEGE

#### SETTLEMENT OF LIBEL SUIT BETWEEN *OTTAWA CITIZEN* AND MEMBER FOR CUMBERLAND-COLCHESTER

**Hon. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland—Colchester):** Mr. Speaker, on Friday of this week I will celebrate my 31st anniversary as a Member of Parliament.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Coates:** It therefore pleases me that today that I have had the only blot on my reputation as a Member of Parliament removed by *The Ottawa Citizen*.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Coates:** This has never been a partisan political issue. It has been a personal battle between myself and *The Ottawa Citizen* over the offensive words contained in a February 12th, 1985, article in that paper which states that by visiting a bar in Lahr, West Germany, I had posed a risk to my security and thus the nation's security. Those statements and others relating to security caused me to resign my portfolio for, in my opinion, I could not perform my responsibilities as Minister of National Defence with that cloud, through those words, hanging over my head.

In my view, then and today, that story severely damaged my reputation and libelled me. The fact it has taken three years and four months and many thousands of dollars on my part, and over \$1 million on the part of *The Ottawa Citizen* by its own admission, to remove those offensive words indicates the awesome power of the media when they determine they are not going to admit to an obvious libel. The fact they would spend over \$1 million to stay out of court on the main issue of the libel makes it absolutely obvious that they knew that by going to court they would have been found guilty of that libel.

However, what it has told me, and tells all Members of this House, is that the media, playing fast and loose with the reputations of Members of Parliament, can with their great wealth and awesome power prevent justice from being done. It is often said that justice delayed is justice denied. In my case that is certainly the fact.

If it had not been for my friends I could not have seen this matter through to this satisfactory conclusion. Without friends I would not have cleared my name. *The Ottawa Citizen* was prepared to use legal tactics to prolong the case by a further two years. That is the reason for the settlement. However, with the removal of the security implications, there is and was no story to write. I must thank Gerald Doucet for his assistance in putting forward an arrangement that allowed individual Canadians to contribute to my defence fund. The Government of Canada made no contribution to that fund.

### Point of Order—Mr. Wilson

*The Ottawa Citizen* makes a point of stating there was no payment made by them to me in the settlement. I never sought financial gain from this libel action. I sought only to have my name cleared, and this has finally happened.

I must thank the Members of all Parties in this House, for they have been both kind and supportive of my efforts to clear my name. I must thank my family for their commitment throughout this ordeal, and it was an ordeal. I also must thank the many lawyers who gave me assistance in this libel action.

What we as Members of Parliament must now face is a concern for the ordinary Canadian who is libelled by the media. If I, with my friends, could not secure my day in court, what chance is there for the ordinary Canadian, if libelled, to secure his or her day in court? There cannot be two levels of justice in this nation, one for the rich and one for the not so rich. However, that in my view is what this libel action has been all about. It is not libel chill but the chilling impact of the awesome power of the media to do what they wish and, because of their wealth, prevent justice from being done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ronald Mitton, the lawyer who handled my case in Nova Scotia from the beginning to the end. I am very relieved and pleased today to be standing in this House and being able to say to you, Sir, that I have cleared my name.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Speaker:** I want to express to all Hon. Members my appreciation for their courtesy in hearing the statement. I am sure that all of us can understand that on occasions like this there is perhaps justification for some flexibility in the usual application of the rules.

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● (1510)

### POINT OF ORDER

#### CORRECTION TO MEMBER'S STATEMENT

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong) indicated that a certain taxpayer who is having some difficulties also had some difficulties with my office as his Member of Parliament. I want to make it clear in the House today that I am not his Member of Parliament, and he neither lives nor works in my riding. This person did contact my office. I believe that last Friday was the first time we heard from him, but I am not his Member of Parliament nor does he work in my riding.