

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 18, 1964

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. NUGENT—MOTION FOR REFERENCE TO
COMMITTEE OF NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL

Mr. Terry Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege affecting all hon. members of the house. It arises out of an editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen* of yesterday, Wednesday, June 17 headed "The End of the Affair" dealing with the report of the standing committee on privileges and elections.

The report of that committee is printed in *Votes and Proceedings* of Monday, June 15. The essence of that report is contained in paragraph 5 and the following paragraph which say there is no evidence of bribery or attempted bribery, and no question of privilege. As a member of that committee I feel that the deliberate misconstruing of that report by this editorial writer cannot go unchallenged.

The first sentence of the editorial says in part:

When Mr. Gérard Girouard, the Social Credit-turned Conservative M.P., accused the director of the Liberal party of trying to bribe him into joining the government side—

That is a deliberate lie by the editorial writer. There never was any such statement made by the hon. member for Labelle, and in fact throughout the hearings of that committee the hon. member for Labelle himself said there was no attempt to bribe him. The house will remember that when the hon. member for Labelle rose on his question of privilege on April 27, as recorded at page 2583 of *Hansard* he said:

The benefits: a party in power and a fat electoral fund for the next election.

The only suggestion that there had been a bribe offered was the statement by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) in this house on April 28, when he rose on a question of privilege concerning this matter and said, as recorded at page 2645 of *Hansard*:

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the member for Labelle has alleged in this house that he was

offered a bribe, that he was offered certain advantages if he would take a certain position in this House of Commons.

The only suggestion of bribery which was made by anyone was that statement by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. The statement made by the editorial writer is therefore completely and directly contrary to the facts, and since the hon. member for Labelle himself denied there was any attempted bribery it is obvious that the editorial writer is deliberately lying when he makes this accusation against that hon. member.

Further, Mr. Speaker, there appears this sentence in the editorial: "Thus, Mr. Davey is vindicated". The house will recall that the hon. member for Labelle rose on a question of privilege because he had been termed by Mr. Davey a "Liberal reject". The committee in considering this whole matter spent a considerable length of time examining the question and the evidence as to whether the hon. member for Labelle had in fact tried to join the Liberal party or had in fact been rejected. The report of the committee makes no reference whatsoever to Mr. Davey's charge. Mr. Davey was by no means vindicated by the report of that committee, so this is the second deliberate lie by the writer of the editorial.

That is not the only objectionable part of the editorial, because the writer then goes on to make allegations against an hon. member of this house which can only be called scurrilous. I will read the rest of the editorial so that hon. members may fully understand the slanderous imputation which this editorial writer makes so falsely against a member of this house. The last two paragraphs read as follows:

We are left with Mr. Girouard, and a nasty precedent. Parliamentary privilege is absolute, and no legal action can lie against a member who makes an accusation that would be held defamatory if it were made in another place. But privilege implies responsibility. And the "honourable members," as they love to call themselves—

And I would just point out that "honourable members" is put in quotation marks

—must be careful not to defame without justification individuals outside the house who do not share their legal immunity.

If Mr. Girouard can escape this incident without censure, there will be a temptation for unscrupulous members to think that it is worth making any reckless accusation against a political enemy.