

Privilege—Mr. Nielsen

is no question of that; it is a fact. He is doing it illegally and there can be no argument about that.

The second point, which I think is germane to the rights and privileges of individual Members of Parliament, is simply, as Your Honour will know, that it has now been established under your direction and control that MPs are allowed to maintain constituency offices for the purpose of serving their own constituents. This is a welcome development of parliamentary practice in our country. What we have here is another aspect of the situation respecting the establishment of these offices, which is also beyond question and cannot be attacked as being anything but a fact, and that is that the purpose of these offices, which are created and established by ministers for political purposes, is to undermine the ability of the member in that region from carrying out his responsibilities toward his constituents.

In other words, the government is attempting, by virtue of these offices, to sidetrack the public from going to see their Member of Parliament. While there has not been any physical molestation in the sense of battering rams or "split herrings", I suggest that what has happened in this instance is that there is an infringement of the ability of a Member of Parliament to carry out his duties. In other words, what is there to prevent a cabinet minister—we have not heard from the cabinet minister responsible for my riding for some time—from opening up an office in my riding or in the riding of my colleague, the hon. member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight), in order to undermine our ability as members to deal with our constituents and also impair our ability to represent those constituents in the House?

That is the precise and simple point I want to bring to Your Honour's attention. I think that if one looks at what is involved in this question of privilege, one finds that it consists of the infringement of the ability of a Member of Parliament to carry out his responsibilities in the House of Commons. I say that so long as these illegal political offices are maintained in our constituencies and there are no provisions under Treasury Board guidelines, no governmental decrees and no rules of the House of Commons permitting the opening of such offices because the people who are manning these ministerial offices are members of the House of Commons, they are impeding my ability and the ability of my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon, in carrying out our functions as Members of Parliament.

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, following on what my colleague, the hon. member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn), has said, it seems to me that the question you have to decide is whether or not the various privileges which are established by the House for its members, regardless of party, have any independent value or meaning, or whether they can be undermined or eroded by virtue of the unilateral decision of the government to establish any number of ministerial offices which offer a competing service, which compete directly with the service offered by an MP. As well, there is the question whether the general services which members are encouraged to provide are, in a sense, an extension of

the function of being a Member of Parliament which is worthy of protection, or whether the government can unilaterally establish whatever institutions it chooses politically to establish, thereby rendering virtually meaningless the privileges and rights which the House has decided to establish for all its members—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I think I have to ask members not to repeat the argument that there is competition in a particular constituency because a certain office has been established, that office having to be regulated by criteria emanating from the Treasury Board. First, I cannot determine whether or not the regulations of the Treasury Board have been violated, or whether or not the matter in question is illegal. So I ask hon. members not to submit this kind of argument to the Chair because the Chair is not competent to decide it.

As for the matter of competition if another office is located next to a member's office, this matter equally is one which I cannot decide. If the hon. member were able to represent to me, as I thought the hon. member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) was going to do, that some physical barrier had been put up in order to prevent his constituents from coming to his office because of the fact that this other office was in existence, perhaps I could have entertained such an argument.

However, I do ask hon. members not to play on words but to come straight to the matter that they feel constitutes a breach of privilege, not repeat arguments which I have already heard; members know that when arguments begin to be repetitive, my inclination is to feel the Chair is sufficiently informed. So I want to remind the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) that I do not believe I can entertain those arguments. If he has other arguments to submit, I will be prepared to listen to them.

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, having heard what you have to say, I do not think there is much point in my continuing my submission. I say that you have to ask yourself how far governments can go in undermining the rights of Members of Parliament by establishing other services. It is a conflict between the unlimited power of government and the rights of MPs which have been established by Parliament itself. If Madam Speaker finds that argument repetitive or unconvincing, I am sorry but there is nothing more I can add.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, I will attempt to be brief. The ministerial office in the Calgary area is staffed by a cabinet minister from the other place. I suggest that the barrier to my ability to represent my constituents and to the ability of other Members of Parliament in their areas is a matter on which there is confusion. When people who reside in that community in fact approach the minister in his office, they believe they are talking with someone who is representing them in the House of Commons. Madam Speaker will know in that particular case that it is not reality. The people feel they are speaking with a member of the House of Commons who can bring their case to this House—