

*Privilege—Mr. Cooper*

My question of privilege today essentially relates to three areas. The first question of privilege is that I believe there has been an attempt to inhibit my freedom of speech in this Chamber. Second, there has been a threat made against my office, and therefore against me, in an attempt to influence my actions in the House of Commons. Third, there has been an attempt to intimidate my office and therefore to hamper the manner in which I perform the role of spokesman for Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Official Opposition in this House.

Beauchesne's Fifth Edition, page 49, Citation 157 indicates that Official Opposition spokesmen are given precedence in asking questions in the House. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the role of official spokesman in the House of Commons is an important role which must be protected so as to allow the proper carrying out of any duties attached to that specific responsibility. Lately there seems to be an increasing tendency on the part of Government officials to attempt to intimidate either Members of Parliament or their constituents in order to stop criticism of a particular Department or Crown corporation. We saw such a case last week when a constituent of the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) was harassed by Revenue Canada officials for going to the Hon. Member with his revenue problems.

It is because of this, Mr. Speaker, that I rise on my question of privilege today. I believe any attempt to prevent a Member from performing his duties is a breach of privilege and that if Government officials are free to hassle Members or their constituents the ability of back-bench Members of Parliament to perform their jobs will cease.

Last Thursday I rose and asked a question of the Minister responsible for Canada Post. The following day, Friday, February 3, my office received an abusive phone call from the project officer to the President of Canada Post. This call was clearly an attempt to influence my actions in the House of Commons by way of threats and insults.

Citing from the Twentieth Edition of Erskine May, page 151 under the headline "Acts Tending Indirectly to Obstruct Members in the Discharge of Their Duty" reads:

Conduct not amounting to a direct attempt to influence a Member in the discharge of his duties, but having a tendency to impair his independence in the future performance of his duty, will also be treated as a breach of privilege.

On 25 June 1963, the Speaker ruled that a letter sent by a Parliamentary Agent to a Member informing him that the Promoters of a Private Bill would agree to certain amendments on condition that he and other Members associated with him would refrain from further opposition to the Bill constituted a *prima facie* breach of privilege.

Beauchesne's Fifth Edition at page 20, Citation 55, says:

The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member of Parliament on the floor of the House and in committee.

When the project officer called my office—and one can only assume because of her direct access to the President that it was with his blessing—she was angry that my office had not cleared the question with the President's office. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this was an attempt by the office of the President of

this Corporation to interfere with my freedom of speech or action in this House.

Citing Beauchesne's Fifth Edition on influencing Members, at page 22 Citation 67 says:

It is generally accepted that any threat to a Member, attempting to influence his vote or his actions as a Member, is a breach of privilege.

I believe my privilege was further breached when this individual made it very clear that we would receive no co-operation or information from the President's office if "that was the route we wanted to go". In other words, unless we cleared our questions with the President's office we would not receive any help in performing the role for which I am an official spokesman in the Opposition. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this was a threat designed to influence my actions. It is, I believe, a very serious threat. If this threat were carried out it would mean that all information from Canada Post would cease to be available to me and therefore I could not possibly perform my job. If this were to happen to other Members of Parliament who did not clear their questions, then our ability to function as Members of Parliament would cease. If we as Members lose our ability to serve as ombudsmen to Government Departments for our constituents, a very large part of our purpose ceases to exist.

Citing again from Erskine May on page 158 under the heading "Molestation of Members on Account of Their Conduct in Parliament" it says:

It is a breach of privilege to molest any Member of either House on account of his conduct in Parliament.

The following are instances of this type of contempt:

It then goes on to say:

Sending insulting letters to Members in reference to their conduct in Parliament or letters reflecting on their conduct as such Members—

That was in 1831 prior to the use of telephones. I think the same thing can be applied to the use of a telephone. Just before our caller rudely hung up on my office, she called our action "sleazy", an obviously degrading insult to my office and to myself. This type of comment does, I believe, fall under the reference I have just quoted in Erskine May.

I believe this abusive action from the office of the President of Canada Post was an attempt to insult, threaten and influence my actions in this House and therefore is a breach of my privileges. There is today an increasing concern that the non-elected arm of government, the officials in some government Departments and Crown corporations, have become so powerful that they no longer answer to either the Ministers responsible or to Parliament. This power has allowed them to threaten Members of Parliament, criticize their actions and abuse their constituents, all without any fear of action from Parliament itself. Last week's threatening of a constituent of the Hon. Member for Waterloo by Revenue Canada officials clearly demonstrates the contempt in which these officials hold Parliament and its Members.

● (1510)

This abusive phone call which my office has received would seem to imply that postal officials had a contract with my