

Privilege—Mr. Holtmann

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague always has the same answer when he is caught. It is "Speak to the question of privilege". I listened to my colleagues' comments. Perhaps when I bring up the subject of trust he feels a little uneasy too; I can understand that. However, I suggest to my colleague and I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that you make the decision on whether or not a question of privilege goes forward to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, but we make the decision on whether or not to trust.

Mr. Speaker: I wonder whether I could ask for the co-operation of Hon. Members. Perhaps the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann) or the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry) could answer a question which I should like clarified. Was a report actually written?

Mr. Holtmann: Mr. Speaker, I think the record would show that at the *in camera* session there was a draft for consideration. I think the record would also show, if Hon. Members chose to look at the statements of the committee, that in fact the proposal was that the committee not report at that time. It never suggested that the committee should not report, as was suggested by the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner).

Furthermore, it was the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior who asked for a vote. Does that then mean, according to his argument, that he can turn an *in camera* session completely around—or can any Member of the House—by calling for a recorded vote? To me that is a hypocritical point of view.

Mr. Speaker: This is an important matter, and the Chair treats it as important. Again, in the proper spirit of arguments on points like this one, I do not think there is any particular need to use pejorative words about the motivations or actions of another Member.

The Chair understands very well the importance of this matter, and I think I have the fact pattern quite clear. Obviously it is important when Hon. Members agree to enter into an *in camera* discussion. The Chair does not consider the matter before us to be a particularly easy one. It will take some very careful consideration. However, if there are other Hon. Members who feel they may have something to assist the Chair, I would be pleased to hear them.

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, following on your last comments I wish to intervene for a few seconds. We have a difficulty in House of Commons committees. It is certainly true what Hon. Members on all sides have said, that we have a tradition of *in camera* meetings. Those *in camera* meetings are often used to deal with the details of a report and to provide an opportunity for members of the committee to try to reach some compromise. That has been a very useful exercise on a number of occasions. It has enabled us to have various task forces and committees of the House of Commons

come out with unanimous reports and other reports which have been very solid.

However, there is a problem which I have noticed on an ongoing basis. Quite often many controversial issues are being settled in *in camera* meetings. Obviously this was a case where government Members felt one way and the members of the two opposition Parties felt the complete opposite. A recorded vote was taken. It is very important when there is a division in committee. The public has a right to know what is going on. It is all right to try to work toward some resolution in a committee. If it can be achieved, it is wonderful. However, we must not allow the ability of a committee to go *in camera* to be used to prevent the public from knowing what is going on. If there is a division in committee, I think all committees should move immediately from an *in camera* session to a public session. That should be the responsibility of the chairperson of the committee. It is something we should address, rather than being concerned about what happened in this particular case.

We should ensure that in future our committees are working in such a way that we have the right to move to *in camera* when necessary and useful and to move automatically into the public domain when there is obviously a split, in that the public has a right to know what is going on.

Mr. Speaker: As the Chair has indicated, this is an important matter.

I want to thank the Hon. Member for Selkirk—Interlake (Mr. Holtmann) and the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River (Mr. Parry) for their joint co-operation in enabling us to hear the entire argument today. I also thank the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon. Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner), and the Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) for their interventions. Frankly, the Chair finds them very helpful.

● (1200)

The Chair will reserve on this matter. However, if I can put it this way, the defence of the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River is that there is a distinction between the report of a vote and the deliberations that were taking place *in camera*. I may or may not find that distinction. What is important is that the Hon. Member for Kenora—Rainy River has not taken the position that anything that goes on at an *in camera* meeting, just because one may not agree with it, ought then to be reported. It is important that Hon. Members and the public watching and listening realize that the defence does not reach that far. Certainly the Chair has not taken it to have been meant in that respect.

I thank Hon. Members for their interventions. It is an important matter. It is a vexatious matter because the line between openness and the occasional time when it is appropriate to go into an *in camera* meeting is sometimes a difficult one to find. I shall do the best on behalf of all the Members to come back with an appropriate response.