

Inquiries of the Ministry

I think, Mr. Speaker, this is an unprecedented event so far as Canadian history is concerned, that a member of the defence forces of this country, and particularly the chief of the defence staff, would impute to members of this house and members of the defence committee improper motives in regard to the stands and positions they have taken with respect to a measure which is now before the house.

I think there is absolutely no excuse for conduct of this kind. It has never been permitted for members of the defence forces or members of the civil service in this or any other country which has the British parliamentary system of government, and I think it is incumbent not only on the Minister of National Defence but on the Prime Minister to take disciplinary action in this case in order to ensure that there be no repetition of instances of this kind.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Paul Martin (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman has raised this matter as a question of privilege. I do not rise to comment on the substance; I have not seen the statement. I do wish, however, to point out to Your Honour rule 41-A which deals with questions of privilege. It is not open to the hon. gentleman to raise the question in the absence of the notice provided for in this new rule which governs our procedure.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have no doubt that hon. members will accept the correctness of the procedural point raised by the Acting Prime Minister. I felt it was my duty to hear the statement to be made by the hon. member for Calgary North, but the rule is clear that an hour's notice is to be given on a question of privilege. This is a rule which has been adopted by parliament and which parliament would expect to be followed.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): It arose out of the minister's answer.

Mr. Speaker: The suggestion is made that the question of privilege arises out of the minister's answer. I would not agree with that suggestion. If the hon. member for Calgary North felt he had a valid question of privilege he should have raised it according to the rules. I suggest to him that it would have been very easy to give the prescribed notice, as all hon. members invariably do when a question of privilege is raised in the house.

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Mr. Harkness: Mr. Speaker, I did think my question of privilege arose out of the minister's reply, which was so contrary to what has been the practice in the past in this house. I thought I had a valid question of privilege which arose at that time, but naturally I defer to your judgment on the matter.

I should like to ask the Acting Prime Minister a supplementary question. As Acting Prime Minister will he take action to ensure that instances of this kind do not recur and that disciplinary action is taken in this case?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated I have not seen the statement. I will be glad to look at it. I will do so in the light of what my honourable and respected friend has suggested.

Hon. Michael Starr (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I have a related question. In view of the statement by the Minister of National Defence over last week end, I should like to ask whether he was enunciating official government policy when he told the Young Liberals Association that the press of Canada was guilty of irresponsible reporting and had done a great disservice to Canada in the manner in which the news was reported.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Speaker, I do not know that it is open to an hon. member to ask anyone in the house whether he agrees with the views of a colleague or another member of this house. However, since my hon. friend has put that question I should like to say in answer to my hon. friend that the Minister of National Defence has the right to state his views, just as my hon. friend has that right. I recall one occasion, when my hon. friend was questioning a matter which I raised about his particular administration, when he made an observation which I do not think reflected too kindly on the press of this country.

Mr. Starr: What was it?

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the Minister of National Defence whether in his years in office he has familiarized himself with Q. R. & O. If so, does he not realize that his answer is entirely wrong?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.