

his document tomorrow night amounts to a prima facie breach of privilege.

There is a second point I wish to make in support of the motion of the Leader of the Opposition which is this. If we are talking about harm to the role, that is to say the privileges of Members of Parliament, then it is clear that we have the evidence of this, again from the mouth of the Minister of Finance, since he has admitted that this group of 20 is looking at the very material that is to be presented to the House at eight o'clock tomorrow night. They are looking at it today, a full 24 hours before the group of Canadians elected by the people of Canada as Members of Parliament to receive the material from the Minister of Finance have had a chance to receive that material formally in the House of Commons.

He has offered no convincing explanation as to why this group of 20 should today see this material to be presented to the Members of the House of Commons tomorrow night. He has said that the books are closed. He has said that no matter what advice this group of 20 gives him it will be too late.

What we see here then is an attempt to put a group of private citizens in a superior position, a position to which they are not entitled by law or by custom, over the position of Members of Parliament elected to receive the type of information the Minister is presenting to the House and to other people in the country. I again say that out of the mouth of the Minister of Finance himself we see the admission at least of a prima facie breach of privilege.

The Minister, and I believe the Parliamentary Secretary, have asked why Members on this side of the House should be concerned about this group of 20 getting this information today. After all, the Minister says, they are all honourable people. I am not getting up to challenge that. However, what we are dealing with here is appearances. Appearances count when it comes to what happens in the House of Commons, when it comes to the conduct of Members of Parliament who happen to be Ministers. After all, the report by Jan Wong in *The Globe and Mail* quotes one of the people in this group of 20, a Mr. Allan Taitz, a tax partner at Thorne Ernst & Whinney, as saying about the advance look at the material he has, compared to that available to Members of Parliament: "This gives us a bit more time to digest it—every firm in town is going to write a report for their clients." I do not understand why the Minister of Finance is not concerned about what is allowed to happen in terms of the appearances of the matter for himself and his advisors in the Government and this group of 20.

I conclude by saying that I think on the facts and in the absence of clear, convincing and binding precedents to the contrary upon Your Honour you are entitled to find that there is in fact a prima facie breach of privilege. I wish to underscore that point by saying that we are talking not simply about a press report but about what the Minister of Finance himself has admitted in the House in reply to the motion of the Leader of the Opposition, that this group of 20 are looking at the document today in advance of elected Members of Parliament.

Privilege—Mr. J. Turner

For all these reasons the Chair is well entitled to find that there is a prima facie breach of privilege. I hope and say this with the utmost respect, Sir. In view of the importance and significance of this issue, I hope it will be possible to hear from Your Honour, in the difficult decision you have to make in this matter, before the Minister of Finance presents what he calls a White Paper, but what we now know will in fact be a budget with all the consequences for the people of Canada and all the consequences for the Minister because of this inappropriate and questionable release of information to this group of 20 today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I raised some questions with the Minister today on this matter of privilege which is of utmost importance for the House of Commons because I was deeply concerned that the Government had shared its intentions with a group of senior consultants, accountants and lawyers with an expertise on tax matters, people who had previously been hired without pay to act as a sounding board for the Minister.

However, now that they have the advantage of being privy to every intention of the Minister 48 hours before the Minister himself makes those intentions known to the general public, I am somewhat concerned with this matter of privilege in view of the fact that I had a conversation yesterday with the Minister and I asked him why he insisted to designate the people from the New Democratic party who may take part in tomorrow's lock up to review the draft White Paper.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister insisted that some experts whom we wanted to involve in that process would not be allowed to do so, but that we should have at least four Members of the House out of eight people allowed to take part in the process.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, the private sector is entitled to bring in 20 experts who are the trusted friends of the Minister and who will be fully informed of the contents of that Paper. This is clearly indicated for instance in the comments of Mr. Couzin, a lawyer with Stikeman Elliott. He said specifically that the task of those experts will be to provide their colleagues and their clients with an explanation of the Governments' intentions. It is indeed clear why those people accepted to work without pay, since they will be deriving virtually boundless benefits from that process. It means that they will get an appreciation of that Tax Reform Paper well in advance of their colleagues who will get to know the details after 8 p.m. tomorrow when this White Paper is disclosed.

[*English*]

I have to admit somewhat personally—

● (1610)

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.