

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

which has come to my attention on the proposed plan of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Danson) to issue a statement in Gander, Newfoundland, later this day announcing the new search and rescue policy for Canada. After I establish what I hope to be a question of privilege, I intend to move a substantive motion.

This information came to my attention by way of the press in Newfoundland who had been alerted to the fact that the Minister of National Defence would be going to Newfoundland today to make a statement on a new national defence policy. The minister gave me an assurance last Tuesday that no such statement would be made because he was on his way to attend a NATO meeting in Europe and there would not be time for such a statement this week. He gave me an undertaking that I would be notified. Today, while I was trying to get the substance of the minister's statement from his colleague, the Minister of Transport, who shares jurisdiction in this regard, the Minister of National Defence happened to be sitting in his office with a statement which is being denied to this House.

The statement which will be made in Gander, Newfoundland, at eight o'clock tonight is on a matter which has been before this House for the past 11 months. It has been before the House in the form of questions, adjournment debates, a petition with 40,000 names, and numerous questions during the oral question period. Indeed, it was so much an issue in the last part of the last session that the Minister of Transport, who has a great deal of responsibility in this regard, issued a statement on April 7 announcing the establishment of a task force to advise the government of a new search and rescue policy. That announcement came after three tragedies off the east coast in which six Canadian fishermen were lost.

Further action was prompted at the beginning of the present session by the foundering of the Dutch ship *Gabrielle* and the loss of 13 lives. Following that tragedy, I reminded the minister of an undertaking which he gave to the House last April that he would be reporting on the recommendations of the task force by midsummer. The minister, outside the House, following questions, on October 18 gave an undertaking that a statement would be made within two weeks. That was a month and a half ago.

I maintain that the Minister of National Defence is contemptuously denying to this parliament information which is being released to the press today. He is denying the members of this House the opportunity to question him on that statement. That would be all right if the minister had made that statement in the House under the provisions of Standing Order 15(3). The press assembled in Gander, Newfoundland, tonight will have the privilege of questioning the Minister of National Defence on that statement. We will be denied that privilege.

I maintain that this is contempt by the Minister of National Defence. It is equally contemptuous for the Minister of Transport, who has jurisdiction in this regard. He has assumed most of the responsibility in this House with regard to questions, motions and speeches: he rose in his place today in response to my question and denied this House information which is now

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in his possession and is being prepared for release to the press later this day. The minister is not leaving Ottawa until four o'clock this afternoon. The press conference is not scheduled until eight o'clock this evening. However, we are being denied the right to have access to this statement and to cross-examine the minister on the contents of it. I say that is contemptuous.

This situation differs from the question of privilege raised a few days ago by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) with respect to the statement made over television by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) on the Quebec election. It differs in this fundamental respect. The statement on a new air-sea rescue policy being made to the press in Newfoundland later this day is a matter which has seized the attention of this House almost daily for the past 11 months. For the minister and his colleague to deny the House at this time something which the minister undertook to provide to the House in statements both inside and outside the House is, I submit, a complete violation of the practices of this House. It shows a degree of contempt for this House which one would not expect from a minister of the Crown, particularly a former minister of justice.

My question of privilege is that the practices of this House have been substantially violated.

● (1510)

I contend that the Minister of National Defence and his colleague, the Minister of Transport are in contempt of the House. I would remind you, sir, that the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization has no reference before it at this time. It has not been constituted since the session began. This is the second time this question has come before the Chair as a matter of privilege. In these circumstances, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker):

That the matter of ministerial statements made outside parliament while parliament is in session be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): I shall make only a brief intervention, Mr. Speaker, since some of the statements the hon. gentleman has made are only within the knowledge of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Danson). I must say, though, that the hon. member's motion is, as far as I can see, not a question of privilege at all but, rather, a matter affecting the rules and procedures of the House. As I indicated in my first response to the hon. member's question, I find it extremely surprising that he should say it was contemptuous to announce a program of great importance to Newfoundland, in Newfoundland.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: As I understand the rule, it is by no means absolute even on the question of policy statements. Certainly, not every statement as to ways of dealing with particular matters needs to be made in the House. In this case, our purpose in establishing effective search and rescue services is well known. It was well known, too, that we were working on