

great deal of information to the largest body of members in the House, namely the Liberal caucus, at a day and time we can only yet still ignore.

I will not get into all the questions that this situation brings up, and you will know that there are many dimensions to this question. They are all very grave. Most of the time they have called for the resignation of the Minister of Finance.

I want to raise a very specific issue in regard to this principle. I am putting this question of privilege because I believe that the matter I am talking about poses a grave hindrance to my ability to accomplish my duties as a member of Parliament for the riding of Sherbrooke.

It is greatly troubling to me, should such actions be found to be true, that the people of my riding and all Canadians would find disrepute and maybe even contempt for this place. In such circumstances I fail to see how any of us would be able to accomplish our work properly. That is surely a question of privilege for myself and for every person here.

Even more sad is what this could mean for free speech. I respectfully ask that you consider in your ruling whether debate in this House can be truly free, frank and sincere if members are led to believe that the contents of the budget that are supposed to be secret for all, without exception, when in the end the truth is revealed to us that the members of the governing party were privy to a special complicity with the Minister of Finance.

• (1210)

The budget is at the heart of why we sit in Parliament. It is at the very heart of what this parliamentary institution is all about. We are here to vote on behalf of our constituents the moneys that allow us to live in a democracy and not pursuant to the whims of an all powerful despot.

That is why the first Commons took away powers from the monarch and that is why this member is claiming back those privileges today. I respectfully ask that you consider this matter, Mr. Speaker, with great attention, urgency and severity.

In conclusion, what we are facing today as a question of privilege is a situation where certain members of the House of Commons, namely the Liberal caucus, according to a public admission by the member for Guelph—Wellington, received privileged, secret information before budget day to the detriment of the members who sit on the opposite side of the House.

Based on that fact, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to rule on this question of privilege.

Privilege

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two issues before the House. First, is this a legitimate question of privilege? Second, was there a breach of the secrecy of the budget?

I will deal with these two issues in reverse order. We should all be reminded that the member who has just raised this question of privilege knows about cabinet secrecy. I would have hoped that in his remarks he could have borne that in mind a little more than he did. I am sorry that he failed in that regard.

I wish to bring to members' attention the question of the secrecy of the budget. There was no breach in the secrecy of the budget. On reading the article yesterday in the newspaper, I telephoned the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington and spoke to her about her comments in the *Hill Times*.

I asked her to put her response in writing and to send it to me so that I could share it very briefly with the House today. In the memorandum she sent to me, which I am perfectly willing to table with the Clerk later with the consent of the House if such were forthcoming, is the following:

To: Don Boudria, Chief Government Whip
From Brenda Chamberlain, M.P.
Re: Our Conversation

In reference to your question, I was referring specifically to the caucus briefing which was held approximately one hour prior to the tabling by the President of the Treasury Board of measures to deal with downsizing in the federal public service.

That downsizing document was tabled on February 21. It has nothing to do with the budget document. There may well have been issues tabled by the President of the Treasury Board that were later reflected in budget decisions.

That may be so but it was not information that was given to Liberal members of Parliament and denied to anyone else. As a matter of fact, the tabling occurred at ten o'clock that morning. That is easily verifiable and I am sure all hon. members, including the member in question, were here that morning.

The hon. member remembers well that the document was tabled. I read from the letter in question:

This announcement took place one week before the budget and dealt with downsizing in the federal public service, which was part of the federal budget. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

I will certainly table the letter if it is the wish of the House.

The second issue is the following. Is it in fact a question of privilege? I wish to bring to members' attention *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, page 13, citation 31(5) which says:

Budget secrecy is a political convention, and if breached,