

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, January 5, 1973

The House met at 11 a.m.

PRIVILEGE

MR. REILLY—DISTRIBUTION OF SPEECH FROM THE THRONE PRIOR TO DELIVERY

Mr. Peter Reilly (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege affecting all members of the House. Yesterday Your Honour admonished members of the House to co-operate with you by observing, among other things, the traditions of the House. Within minutes of that admonition, "flacks" from the Prime Minister's office were distributing in the press gallery copies of the Speech from the Throne fully four hours before the members of this House were to be apprised of its contents. Indeed, the contents of that speech were in print in at least one Ottawa newspaper fully one hour before the appointed time at which members of the House gathered in the other place to hear its contents.

I suggest to Your Honour that, far from reflecting a chastened or different attitude on the part of the government, this is evidence of the most palpable kind that the government continues to hold this House in contempt.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Reilly: In the last parliament members had to walk at least 50 paces off the Hill before becoming nobodies. Now they can achieve nonentity by staying in their appointed places. I believe that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) owes the members of this House an explanation and an apology.

Mr. Speaker: Of course, the hon. member has not proposed a motion and so the matter cannot be pursued further. According to tradition and custom, certainly the Prime Minister or a minister or a member of the House who is particularly involved in the proposed question of privilege is given the right to reply briefly. I believe that the right hon. Prime Minister is seeking the floor for this purpose. However, I have to repeat that since there is no motion before the House the matter cannot be discussed further.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, anything I say would be mainly by way of seeking guidance. I understand that this practice has been going on—

Mr. Diefenbaker: Never.

An hon. Member: It's the same old bunch.

Mr. Trudeau: —for at least 20 years, so we did not initiate anything new here. It has been the frequent policy of various succeeding governments to inform the press of

certain documents. I know it is done with the budget on a lock-up basis.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Not at all. That statement is false; that is not the practice.

Mr. Hees: It is done on a lock-up basis only, and the Prime Minister knows it.

Mr. Trudeau: I wish the hon. members would get together.

Mr. Hees: We are talking about the budget, and you know that.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The right hon. gentleman on a point of order.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, we do not have to get together because the statement made by the Prime Minister has no basis in truth whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

AGRICULTURE

CROP DAMAGE, NORTHERN ALBERTA AND BRITISH COLUMBIA—REQUEST FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT TO MOVE MOTION

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, in this new year I wish to move the first motion under Standing Order 43. The urgent and pressing necessity that impels me to make this application for unanimous consent relates to the situation in parts of northern Alberta and British Columbia where extraordinary weather conditions led to approximately one million acres of crop being under snow before the harvest was completed. If unanimous consent is given I would therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle):

That this House does not regard federal assistance to farmers of northern Alberta and British Columbia as adequate and urges the government to review its program and provide immediate cash acreage payments and rearrange mortgage payments and interest.

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.