

Privilege—Mr. Cossitt

to permit it or not. If that is the case, I hope the Chair will exercise its discretion in favour of the request.

I do not believe the Chair is capable of determining the real question here this afternoon. Frankly, I do not think any single member, or group of members, in this chamber this afternoon can answer the critical, climactic question. That question is whether the document alleged to be authentic by the hon. member for Leeds Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) is an authentic government document or not. That is the prime question which eventually has to be answered. That is the bottom line. With no disrespect to the Chair, I do not think the Chair is capable of making that determination. In fact I do not think the House is capable of that determination.

I suggest that the only body which can properly call witnesses and determine the authenticity or non-authenticity of that document has to be the body set up under the rules of this House of Commons, and that, obviously, is the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. That is the body to which this whole matter should be referred. The committee has the capability of calling witnesses. It can properly investigate whether such a document existed to the knowledge of any member of the government. We cannot determine that, nor can the Chair.

I suggest most sincerely that this not only affects the privileges of the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville, but the privileges of every member of this House. For three Parliaments now some of us have been disgusted with the procedure for answering questions on the order paper. Although I used to place questions on the order paper, I seldom do now. In the last session, of course, it was not possible for me to do that. However, when I did submit questions touching some of those subjects which the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville indicated are within the contents of the memorandum he has at hand, they were not answered. Either they were not answered at all or they were answered in an untruthful, evasive manner.

My experience as a member of this House since 1972 with this and previous Liberal administrations follows exactly along the lines of that memorandum. I suggest that the bottom line, the crunch in this whole question, is whether that document is authentic. The only body which can determine that has to be the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections because we cannot call witnesses before the House. That committee can and, therefore, it should go to that committee.

On top of that argument has to be layered the argument that the only way we will know what we are talking about is to have more information about that document, and certainly to have it appended to today's proceedings of this House. If it is an authentic document, or even if it is not, the members of the House deserve to have it included in today's *Hansard*. Obviously the matter has to go to the committee because, with all due respect, if it is an authentic document, its contents very seriously and gravely affect the privileges of every member of this House.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg-Assiniboine): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Hon. members were granted the floor to intervene on the question of privilege. Are they now rising on the same question of privilege or on a point of order?

Mr. McKenzie: My point of order is that the precedent for appending letters to *Hansard* was established last Thursday when the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Collenette) had a letter regarding transportation appended to *Hansard*. When talking about railroads, he referred to a letter received from an official of one of the railroad companies in Canada and asked to have the letter appended to *Hansard*. If we can have that kind of letter appended, surely an important document like this can be appended, particularly when the precedent was established last Thursday.

● (1540)

Madam Speaker: I would point out to the hon. member that the letter was appended with the unanimous consent of the House. That does make a difference. If we get unanimous consent, a lot of things can happen. Until now I do not have any indication that we do have unanimous consent of the House, but on the question to which the hon. member refers, if my memory serves me well, it did happen with the unanimous consent of the House.

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Madam Speaker, my point of order arises out of something my friend, the government House leader, said with respect to this point of privilege. As I understood him, he pointed out quite properly that with respect to the answering of questions by the government, whether written or oral, there were certain rules applied and if the government did not wish to answer certain questions, it had that option. What disturbs me about this is that in his remarks I do not think he dealt with something that is of the utmost importance, because it appears at this stage that the member from Leeds has been singled out so that his questions are dealt with differently.

That goes really to the foundation of what we are all to expect as humble members of this House. If we are to be treated in one way, then we should all be treated the same, excluding, of course, members of the cabinet or officers of the House who have special privileges. Perhaps my friend neglected to deal with that important question. Assuming he is correct in what he said, and I have no quarrel with the particular procedural point he put forward, it still does not deal with the very important point raised as a grievance by the member from Leeds that he alone, according to his evidence, apparently has been singled out for special treatment.

Madam Speaker: I will make a few remarks before making a definite statement on this question of privilege. I wish to point out to the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville that I have no authority to seal archives or documents or files pending whatever decision might be taken on this particular question. I cannot comply with that request made to me.